

✿ Edited by MARJORIE BARRON NORRIS ✿



✿ MEDICINE AND DUTY ✿

The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill,
Medical Officer, 31st Battalion C.E.F.



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The World War I Memoir of Dr. Harold McGill's Service
as Medical Officer with the 31st Battalion, C.E.F.

EDITED BY
MARJORIE BARRON NORRIS



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FOREWORD

Writing about Canada's military role in the Great War has enjoyed a renaissance in recent years. In the forefront have been some excellent studies by scholars like Tim Cook, Jack Granatstein, Desmond Morton and Bill Rawling.¹ To this scholarly output, however, must be added the first-person accounts of participants, some never before published and others long out-of-print, which have enriched our understanding of the impact of this great struggle on ordinary Canadian soldiers and their families.

Medicine and Duty: Reminiscences of a Battalion M.O., 1914–1917, the 1930s memoir of Dr. Harold W. McGill, is a fine addition to this second category. The detailed, remarkably forthright and often poignant story of Dr. McGill's experiences as the medical officer of the 31st Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force on the Western Front gives us an insider's look at the quietly heroic lives of the men of Flanders fields. Published accounts of the war by Canadian officers of McGill's rank are rare, making this book particularly valuable. Moreover, his memoir effectively complements what is undoubtedly the best recollection of the war by an ordinary Canadian soldier, *The Journal of Private Fraser* – both men served in the same battalion from 1914 through the autumn of 1917.²

1 Here are a few suggestions for further reading: Will R. Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 1997); Tim Cook, *No Place To Run: The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare in the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999); J. L. Granatstein, *Hell's Corner: An Illustrated History of Canada's Great War, 1914–1918* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004); J. L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton, *Marching to Armageddon* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989); Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldiers' Families in the Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004); Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 1993); Marjorie Barron Norris, *Sister Heroines: The Roseate Glow of Wartime Nursing, 1914–1918* (Calgary: Bunker to Bunker, 2002); Bill Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914–1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Reginald H. Roy, ed., *The Journal of Private Fraser, 1914–1918, Canadian Expeditionary Force* (Nepean, ON: CEF Books, 1998); Frederick G. Scott, *The Great War As I Saw It* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 1999); and Victor Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion in No Man's Land* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2000).

2 Reginald H. Roy, ed., *The Journal of Private Fraser, 1914–1918*.

Ablly edited by Marjorie Barron Norris, who has also added some revealing contemporary correspondence by Dr. McGill, *Medicine and Duty* provides us with insight into the life of an infantry battalion from the perspective of a uniquely positioned individual – its medical officer. The very nature of the doctor's responsibilities ensured that no one else among the other thirty-odd officers saw the day-to-day workings of this thousand-man "family" quite so completely. McGill offers brief but revealing sketches of officers and men, of training, relaxation, comradeship, morale, the physical and psychological horrors of combat, and throughout, the relentless endurance required of and displayed by one and all. His matter-of-fact descriptions of the overwhelming challenges medical staff, from doctors to stretcher bearers, faced in rescuing and treating the streams of wounded during "pushes" give us a graphic understanding of the cost of the Canadian Corps' impressive string of battlefield victories. Less dramatic but no less revealing are the accounts of the steady "wastage" of lives that resulted from the random shelling, sniper fire, and pure accident and illness that soldiers at the front suffered through even during so-called "quiet" times.

And what do we learn of Capt. Harold McGill the man? He was earnest, disciplined, and introverted, at times coming across as almost stuffily reserved, though his dry wit is never far from sight. To use the cliché, he was a textbook product of his times – an Anglo-Canadian Protestant in his late thirties with all the prejudices and opinions you would expect of such an individual. Typical of his contemporaries, McGill uses "our people" (the Anglo-Canadian community) interchangeably with the larger Canadian community. French- and immigrant-Canadians of course felt rather differently about the war and Canada's proper role in it. With the 31st Battalion's medical officer, most issues are black and white – starting with the nobility of purpose of the British Empire's cause and the iniquity of all things German. Harold McGill's values also accurately reflect what historians have called the culture of "manliness and militarism" so prevalent in English Canada during the generation before the Great War – that the highest qualities of manhood, namely courage, duty, honour, loyalty, are nowhere more clearly manifested than in the life of a soldier risking all not for conquest but the defence of the innocent and the achievement of lasting peace.³ Too often in our own cynical age the sincerity with which the Great War generation held

3 Mark Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2001).

to such views is dismissed as naïveté at best, and pious posturing at worst. Surely, it is said, no one could actually believe in all that. But Harold McGill, and a great many others among his contemporaries, believed in it strongly enough to risk their lives in a war far from home but increasingly fought for that home as well as King and Empire. Certainly after reading his memoir, we are in no doubt why Dr. McGill endured the trials of the soldier's life in the trenches.

We also see a brave man who risked his life almost recklessly to carry out his duties. The fact that McGill regularly toured the trenches would have impressed the ordinary soldiers of the 31st Battalion. While a practical thing to do, given his responsibilities, it was nonetheless fraught with risks and required courage. The respect his subordinates held for him speaks of this even more than his own obvious contempt for fellow officers who wouldn't lead by example and face the same risks as their men. It was after much soul-searching, and with clear reluctance, that in the autumn of 1917, immediately after the Battle of Hill 70, he finally accepted a transfer to the safer life with a Field Ambulance unit.

Another thread that comes through clearly in *Medicine and Duty* is McGill's compassion. For a man with very fixed views about courage and cowardice, he reveals an uncommon sympathy toward "shell shock" victims. One must remember how little was known about psychiatric illness at the time, as well as the prevailing military ethos of "courage unto death" and the resultant anxiety over any displays of fear in front of one's peers. These factors, when combined with the fact that the primary duty of a medical officer was to ensure the maximum number of his battalion's soldiers were available for duty every day, no matter the medical corners that had to be cut,⁴ go a long way to explaining the tentativeness and outright suspicion that the army displayed toward forms of post-traumatic stress disorder. To his credit, Dr. McGill repeatedly makes the distinction between the volunteer who, having endured combat bravely, just couldn't take it anymore, and the weakling "slacker." We see further evidence of his commonsense compassion in the frequent criticisms of mindless "fatigues" imposed on already exhausted soldiers, or even more obviously in his admiration for the selfless courage displayed by ordinary soldiers in combat.

From Dr. McGill's own opinions – which are always on clear display – and his anecdotal accounts of the sentiments of others, we also learn a

4 The men's nickname for him – "Iodine Pete" – speaks volumes about his no-nonsense approach to treating most injuries.

lot about the soldiers' attitudes toward the enemy. The wishful thinking of so many today that every Canadian soldier forgave the Hun trying to kill him and longed for nothing more than a Christmas truce and a friendly soccer match in No Man's Land with the Saxon farm boy in the other trench is certainly not in evidence in *Medicine and Duty*.

It would be wrong to say this book is entertaining. It is much too grim, too harrowing, too sad, and frankly too candid, for that. But it is certainly gripping. We learn a lot about the war *as it happened* – brief bursts of terror interspersed among long periods of the numbingly mundane where concerns of sleep, hot food, the daily rum ration, friendship, damp, cold, filth, lice, sunsets, hope, and love prevailed. In the end, the finest service of Dr. McGill's reminiscences is that we are never allowed to forget that war is mostly about the death of comrades – on seemingly every page men die, and he makes no effort to hide his personal feelings of loss.

Medicine and Duty will be a valuable addition to the research library of any military historian, and it will provide an equally valuable education to the military history buff or casual reader. The story of the individual always grips us – it is why biography remains so popular – but in *Medicine and Duty* we receive a double serving – the story of Medical Officer Captain Harold W. McGill coupled with the story of the many men who served in the 31st Battalion and what they together managed to achieve against such long odds.

Dr. Patrick H. Brennan
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November 2005

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

After *Sister Heroines* was published in 2002, I found myself loath to quit archival materials relating to the Great War. I chose to edit Dr. Harold McGill's Great War manuscript *Reminiscences of a Battalion M.O.* because his hope that it would be published in his lifetime was never realized. Although editing is not the process I enjoy most, I found the manuscript irresistible. His literate use of the language of the time fascinated me; his detailed account of a doctor's service with an infantry battalion proved sound; and the trove of diaries and letters promised a wealth of contextual material. The editing of this lengthy manuscript took more than four years and came to fruition because of the unfailing support of Professor Donald Smith, Department of History, University of Calgary. Due to his encouragement I submitted it to the University of Calgary Press. For the descendants of Dr. Harold McGill, and others intrigued by military history, I am gratified that the manuscript was accepted for publication.

I was sustained throughout this endeavour by the support of particular institutions and individuals. First and foremost I must acknowledge the assistance I received from Doug Cass, Director of the Glenbow Museum's Library and Archives, Librarian Lindsay Moir, and Archivists Jim Bowman and Pat Molesky. Jan Roseneder, Military History Librarian, Museum of the Regiments, and Alex Wackett, Microform Department, McKimmie Library, University of Calgary, provided on-site assistance. David Love and Alan Mackenzie, and other comrades at the Calgary Military Historical Society, found answers to the questions I posed. Dr. Harold McGill's surviving daughter, Mrs. Doris McNab, contributed photographs and personal recollections of her father.

Journalist Nicole Dunsdon, M.A., remained my computer-literate editor while we worked to reduce the lengthy manuscript without undermining its integrity. Stephen Mills, a military historian in his own right who has made annual pilgrimages to the Western Front, read through my initial draft, honed the footnotes, and suggested the title *Medicine and Duty*. Stephen also contributed rare items from his photographic collection of Great War sites and undertook the drafting of four maps which were prepared for publication by John Daunhauer, C.E.T., of Precise Drafting Services Ltd., Calgary.

I also wish to express my appreciation for the hours spent by Professor Patrick Brennan, Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary, who edited my penultimate draft of the manuscript and wrote the foreword. Dr. Brennan also contributed detailed footnotes on other subjects, such as Harold McGill's views on military strategies, which far surpass my military knowledge. I have credited him for these, for they have truly enhanced *Medicine and Duty*.

Marjorie Barron Norris
November 2006

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Some four years ago I read and photocopied an early draft of Dr. Harold McGill's Great War manuscript titled *Reminiscences of a Battalion M.O.* held at the Glenbow Archives. Dr. McGill served as Medical Officer (M.O.) of the 3rd Alberta Battalion C.E.F. for almost three years – from November 17, 1914, until September 27, 1917, when he transferred to the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance. At the same time I also perused an exchange of letters between him and the editors at the Macmillan Company of Canada. These letters clearly indicated the existence of a later version formatted into chapters. After I discussed the possible whereabouts of this version with Mr. Douglas Cass, Director of the Glenbow Museum's Library and Archives, he offered to contact the surviving daughter, Mrs. Doris McNab of Vancouver. The prospect of her father's wartime memoir being edited and published pleased her, and it was through her that I obtained a copy of the later version.

When I first mentioned having read the Glenbow draft of McGill's manuscript to Professor Donald Smith of the University of Calgary's History Department, I learned of his special interest in the post-war career of Dr. Harold McGill, who arose to prominence while Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs for Canada during the years 1932–1938. Following the amalgamation of the Department of Indian Affairs with the Department of Mines and Resources in 1936, McGill became Director of Indian Affairs until his retirement in 1945.

It is quite possible that Professor Smith's assessment of the McGill manuscript as "a lost gem in the debris of history" is true. *A Surgeon in Arms* by Captain R. J. Manion – a contemporary anecdotal memoir – was published in 1918. Dr. Manion served overseas in 1915 on the staff of a French Red Cross field hospital before enlisting in the Canadian Army Medical Corps in March of 1916. Although a fair portion of *A Surgeon in Arms* is devoted to Manion's recollection of this five-month duty as a battalion medical officer in France, to the best of my knowledge, there is no published history of a Canadian Medical Officer's long service with an infantry battalion during the Great War.

Dr. Harold McGill submitted the final chapters of his manuscript to Macmillan of Canada in early June of 1935, with the hope of having it published. Well aware of its length, Harold suggested that "a certain

amount of condensation and deletion” would improve the memoir. In a letter dated June 5, the publishing house acknowledges his “very just criticism” and concurred that “a little careful pruning would improve the manuscript a great deal.” Although the editors who reviewed the memoir considered it a work of merit, Macmillan of Canada declined for economic reasons. By then, the country was in the throes of the Great Depression, with little chance that book sales would even cover the printing costs.

McGill’s twenty-four-chapter memoir is a structured tour de force. Although the daily entries in his war diary provide the orientation for the memoirs, it is his description of other experiences engraved upon his memory; his frequent inclusion of historical context; and his insightful commentaries upon military and medical matters, especially those which placed the soldiers at risk, that give this all encompassing memoir a special status. *Reminiscences of a Battalion M.O.* is a comprehensive and exacting account that addresses the horrific aspects of military medical service as well as the mundane – the battles as well as the lulls. When condensing and deleting parts of the manuscript, I focused on the lulls.

The first three chapters describe Calgary’s reaction to the outbreak of war, the local response to mobilization, and the barracks life of the 31st Battalion while housed at Calgary’s Exhibition grounds. McGill’s account of the Battalion’s subsequent train journey across Canada, its sea voyage aboard the *Carpathia*, and the time spent training in England evoke the realistic atmosphere of anticipation, tempered by apprehension. The remaining seventeen chapters begin with the Battalion’s September 1915 move to France and its subsequent baptism of fire at the Second Battle of Loos.

Although McGill resurrects other battles, beginning with St. Eloi and the Battle of Sanctuary Wood, in the spring of 1916, it is the September Battle of the Somme, where the battalion suffered 398 casualties in four days of fighting, that overshadows all others. He devotes three chapters to it. The fatal wounding of McGill’s loyal stretcher-bearer sergeant, whom he reluctantly permitted to return to the battlefield against his own better judgment, was a personal decision for which Harold never forgave himself.

Many other 31st Battalion casualties, beginning with the first – a soldier who committed suicide by jumping overboard during the *Carpathia*’s voyage to England – are also recognized. The last important battle for Harold and the Alberta Battalion was Vimy Ridge. The detail allo-

cated to the Canadian Army's taking of the Ridge in the early spring of 1917 addresses both the strategy of attack and the price paid.

After Harold's departure on September 26, the 31st (Alberta) Battalion fought other battles: Passchendaele, Amiens, Arras, and Cambrai. Contact with his former comrades now depended upon the rare occasions when he accompanied carrying parties to the front, or when one of the wounded arrived at the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance for treatment. The bond was never totally severed. As part of the Armistice terms, both the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance and the 31st Battalion marched into Germany to occupy the Rhine bridgehead at Bonn, and in January 1919 both units were withdrawn to Belgium. It was there that the Battalion's regimental colours were consecrated and presented in front of the Namur Cathedral on April 6, three days prior to departure for England.

The 31st Battalion paid a high price in casualties. Nine hundred and forty-one died, of whom 708 were killed in action and missing, presumed dead; 195 succumbed to their wounds; six, some of whom were wounded, died while prisoner of war. Only twenty-four died of disease. There were seven accidental deaths and one unexplained. Non-fatal battle casualties totalled 2,312.

The **Glenbow Archives** also holds a trove of some 350 of Dr. Harold McGill's wartime letters, spanning the years 1915 to 1919. *Reminiscences of a Battalion M.O.*, which was written more than a decade after the war ended, does lack a sense of immediacy at times, but his wartime letters do not because they were written in the trenches or a day or two after an event. Relevant excerpts from the letters are incorporated as footnotes.

The majority, by far, were sent to Emma Griffis, a Calgary nurse, whom he secretly loved. A mere five days after meeting in England during his July 1917 leave, they became engaged, pledging to tell no one. He wrote his first love letter to her upon returning to the trenches on July 12. Then, ten days later, he provided an autobiography.

France, July 22, 1917.

My dearest Emma;—

I have your letter of July 16 containing your gentle reproach for me because of my tardiness in writing. I wrote you a few minutes after reaching my dugout on the night of July 12. I was kept fairly well hustled up until that time. I am afraid though that it was some time before you received the letter, if indeed it reached you at all.

You ask me why I did not give you a hint of what I was thinking – *when I thought*.

I do not exactly get your meaning but I have thought of you every day since I first came to the war, and surely my dear girl you knew I cared for you before I told you so. No, I am grieved to say my dear mother is not alive, and I think it was perfectly lovely of you to ask me about her. I have a brother older than myself and two sisters younger. Our father and mother both died within 10 days of each other many years ago. Margaret was 15 years of age at the time. Ever since the four of us have always maintained a strong family relationship although we have been much scattered, most of the time. We are indeed, I am afraid, inclined to be “clannish.” My brother who has been married for years hardly ever lets a week go by without writing to me, and his wife has been a third sister. They have 3 children.

We don’t know much about each other’s family relationships, do we? But I know that you are a good lovely girl with a keen sense of humour. Did you ever think what a terrible thing it would be for two people, neither with the sense of humour, to live together? Small jolts would be detonated into mine explosions. As for myself – a few unimportant particulars. I was born in Peterborough County, Ontario on the twenty first day of December, 1879 A.D. So you see I am no longer in the first flush of youth. During the past few years indeed I have been alarmed and discouraged at the speed with which the old gentleman with the scythe has been tearing down the road. So far as I know, apart from the hazards of my present occupation, I am a first class risk for a life insurance company. I have never served a term in prison, and my religious belief is very unorthodox. And lastly as I think I warned you I do not belong to the class of predatory rich.

We got our gramophone going yesterday but before it came the Colonel went off to take temporary charge of the brigade and he did not get a chance to hear “When Irish Eyes are Smiling.” I hope you are enjoying your ankle’s recovery. It was a most lucky sprain that, for me. Had it not happened you probably could not have come up to London while I was there and I noticed that the cars at Liphock have no tops on them. Be careful of the T.B. [tuberculosis] cases when you get back.

We are going back to do another tour in the line shortly. Write as often as you conveniently can. Have you a small sized photo of yourself that you could send me? I still have the other one and look at it every day. Certainly write to Mr. Grant; why should you give up your friends?

Yours lovingly,
Harold W. McGill

The collection also contains fifty-four letters to his sister and confidante, Dr. Frances McGill, in Winnipeg, and a rare one or two to his cousin, Birdie Stacey in Toronto. Ever mindful of the powers of the censor,¹ Harold usually exercised caution when expressing his views, the two exceptions being his contempt for Sir Sam Hughes and for opportunistic officers, including his colleagues, who arranged for a transfer to bomb proof jobs in England and Canada. Harold, who considered such departure tantamount to desertion, set forth his views on transfer in a letter to Frances, dated September 15, 1918.

I note your remarks regarding the medical men who have returned to Canada and who are fighting their part of the war while still looking after their respective practices. If some of them had shown as much persistence and strategy in taking German positions as they have been in securing positions for themselves, they would be generals. Verily, they shall have their reward. I had a chance to go back to Canada myself not long since, and one of the chief reasons that caused me to turn the business down was that very thing of which you speak. If I am to be engaged in war work at all I want to be at least near enough the fighting line to hear a gun now and then. Also, I want to have the pleasure of seeing a few German towns going up in clouds of red brick dust before I quit the game. It would be a welcome variation from what I have seen in France and Flanders.

Other letters reveal a personal concern for the well being and safety of his sister and two first cousins who also served in France. His younger sister, Margaret, then aged 29 and a nursing graduate of the Winnipeg General Hospital, joined the Canadian Army Medical Corps. She arrived in England at the end of February 1915 and on May 12, the day the 31st Battalion entrained from Calgary, Margaret embarked for France to join the staff of No. 2 Canadian General Hospital at Le Tréport. A cousin on his mother's side, Ontario-born Dr. Walter Haight, enlisted at age 33 in the CAMC at Esquimalt, B.C. He proceeded overseas in late June of 1915 and within a month joined the staff of No. 2 Canadian Stationary Hospital at Le Touquet, France. Harold's other

1 Officers' correspondence was less frequently and less thoroughly censored than that of enlisted men. Officers, after all, were "gentlemen." – Dr. Patrick Brennan, hereafter – P B.

cousin, Sydney McGill, who grew up on a nearby farm at Minnedosa, Manitoba, enlisted at age 25, promptly after qualifying as a barrister. He served in France in 1916 with the 29th Vancouver Battalion. Margaret and Sydney returned unscathed to Canada.

Harold joined the 31st Alberta Battalion on the day of its official formation – November 14, 1914. The Commanding Officer was a career soldier, forty-three-year-old Colonel Arthur Henry Bell, a native of King's County, Ireland, where he had belonged to the 3rd Battalion Lister Regiment. His military record in South Africa included service in the Cape Mounted Rifles, the Cape Mounted Police, and the Matabele Relief Force Corps. During the South African Campaign he enlisted with the Imperial Yeomanry. Before taking command of the newly formed 31st Battalion in Calgary, he held the rank of Captain in the Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) and was the Staff Adjutant of Military District No. 13. With few exceptions, the men who enlisted were gainfully employed, and British-born or of British descent.

Harold was Irish through and through, and an Anglican. His grandfather, James McGill, emigrated from County Cavan in Ireland in 1819 to take up farming in the township of Cavan, near Peterborough, Ontario. When James chose a wife, she was Margaret Seney, a former pupil of his at the Fairmount village school, where he taught. Her family also came from Ireland. The couple raised ten children, of whom Harold's father, Edward, was the seventh son. At age 29, Edward married Henrietta Wigmore of Norwood, Ontario, whose family were Irish immigrants. After their marriage, Edward travelled west to Manitoba to take up land at Minnedosa, while Henrietta remained at Norwood. She taught at the local schoolhouse and cared for her two young sons, Herbert and Harold, until her husband called upon the family to come.

The father became an active citizen in the young community. In 1884 he was elected a councillor of the rural municipality of Harrison and within two years became its reeve. At this juncture he was also elected to the first school board, where he served as secretary-treasurer. He held both offices for almost fifteen years – until his untimely death.

Harold was twenty, and his two sisters, Frances and Margaret, were in their teens at the time. Their parents had gone to the Brandon exhibition in the summer of 1900, where they contracted typhoid fever. Edward, who was fifty-one years of age, died on September 8, and Henrietta passed away ten days later. Both parents died at home because the hospital in Brandon was full.

After lauding his fifteen years of exemplary public service, the *Minnedosa Tribune's* obituary of September 13, 1900, also noted that his opinions on political matters carried weight. The account leaves little doubt that Harold grew up in a home where discussions centred on politics and on civic duty.

Always a staunch conservative, Mr. McGill was very highly thought of by men of both sides, having been offered the nomination for the local legislature several times, and, had he accepted, would have been a very popular candidate. In the affairs of the empire he took the keenest interest, and though not given to the expression of his own views, he was always thoroughly informed on the public questions of the day. His death in the prime of life will be deeply regretted by a very wide circle, and as far as his name was known he was respected. The sympathy of the whole community is with his widow and children in their irreparable loss.²

The grief-stricken family rallied together. At age twenty-two, Herbert, the eldest, took over the farm so that his brother and sisters could continue their education. He maintained the family home until Harold and his sisters were self-supporting, then chose banking as a career. Edward's younger brother, Allan, and his family, who farmed nearby, also helped.

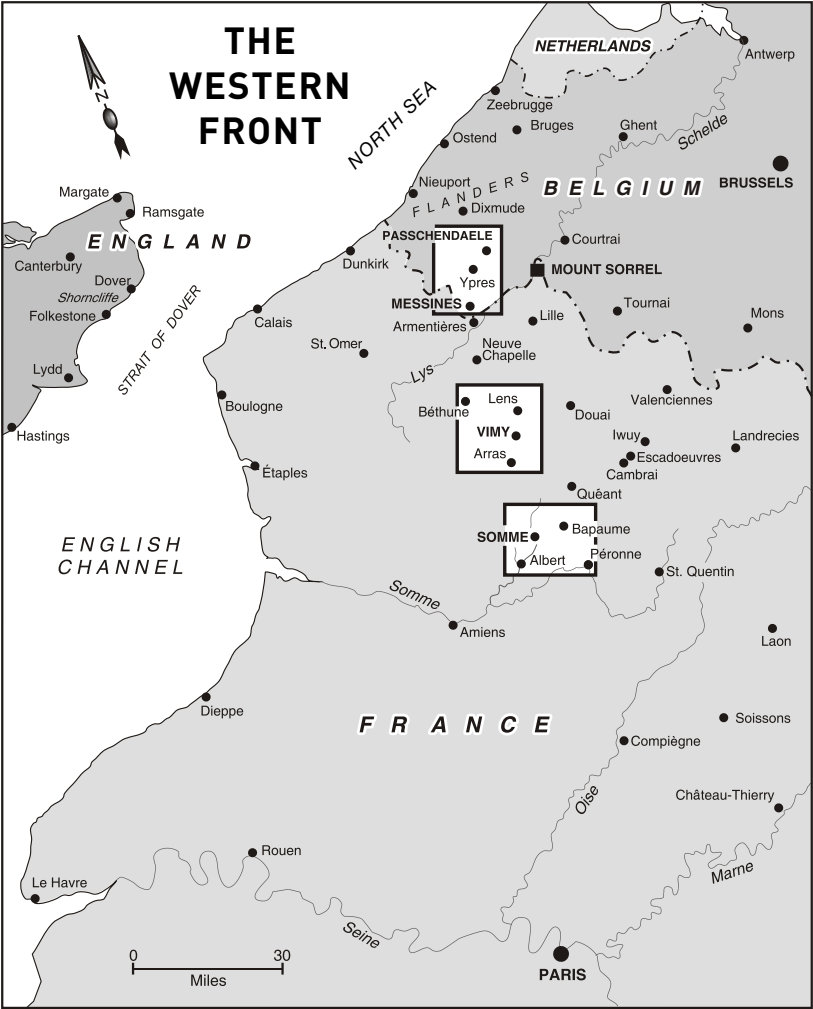
After completing their education at Minnedosa, Harold, Frances and Margaret first taught school in order to raise money for their intended careers in the medical field.³ Both Harold and Frances, who also became a doctor, paid for their first year in medicine at the Manitoba Medical College and won scholarships for the remaining years. Harold served a two-year internship as house surgeon at the Winnipeg General Hospital, then moved west to the small mining community of Exshaw, Alberta. His stay there was brief. In 1908 he travelled to the United States to take

2 *Minnedosa Tribune*, September 13, 1900, 3.

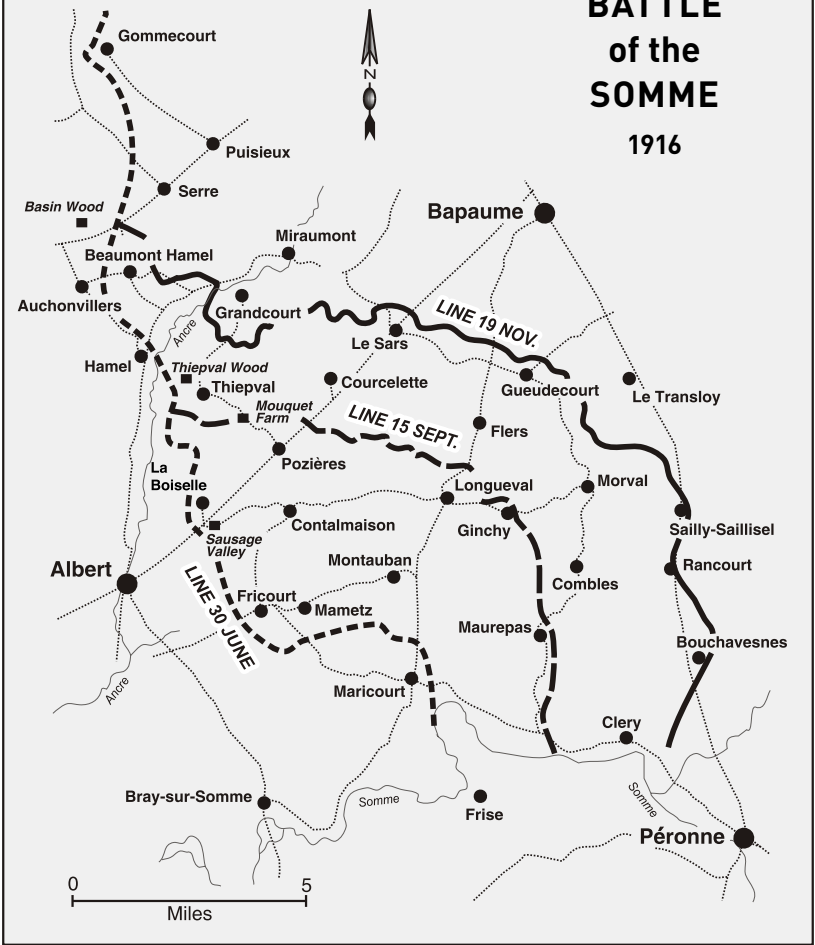
3 Harold's surviving daughter, Doris McNab, recalled that her father enjoyed his few years as a teacher. He read to the class every afternoon from Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson, and, of course, Shakespeare. Doris also recalled that when he read to them as children, he would act out all the parts. He told Bible stories also, but always as literature. While still a youth, the influence of his mother, a former teacher, and a hired man who read Shakespeare to him inspired him to read extensively.

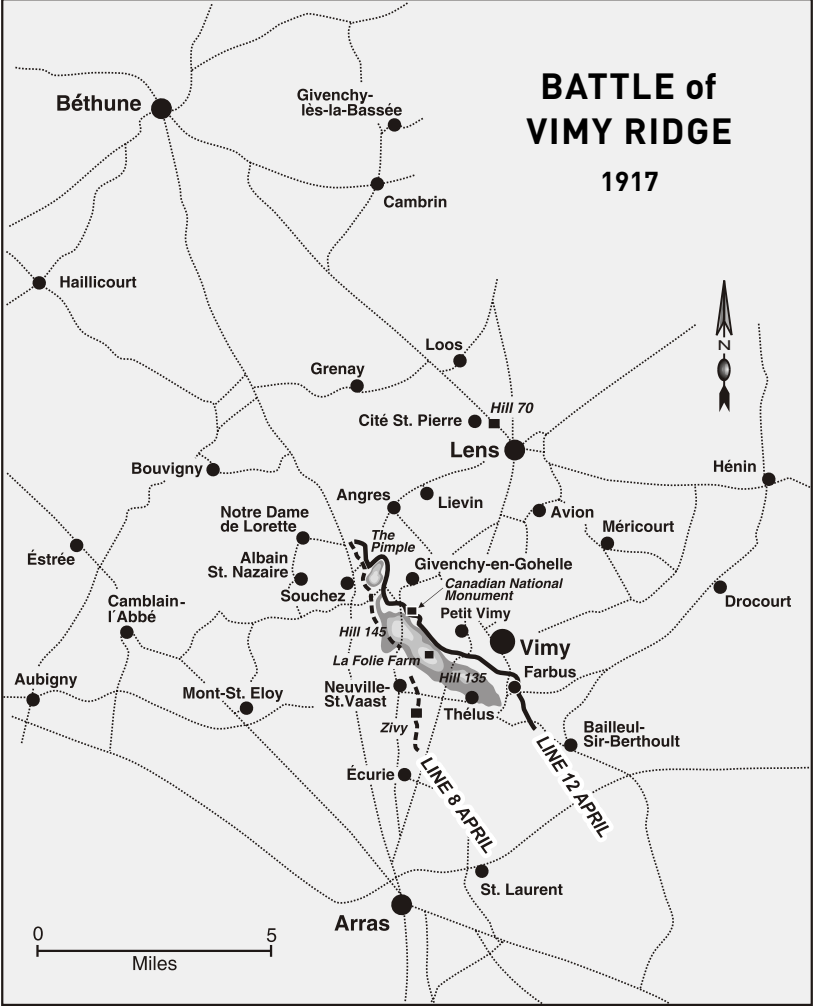
post-graduate courses at the universities of Chicago and Philadelphia. Upon his return to Alberta two years later, he opened a practice in the promising young city of Calgary. Harold was thirty-four years of age when war broke out, and he belonged to the 103rd Regiment Calgary Rifles, the local militia unit.

Marjorie Barron Norris

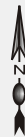


**BATTLE
of the
SOMME**
1916





**BATTLES
of MESSINES and
PASSCHENDAELE**
1914-1918



REMINISCENCES OF A BATTALION M.O.

Harold W. McGill

I THE THREAT OF WAR

Upon my tongues continual slanders ride,
The which in every language I pronounce,
Stuffing the ears of men with false reports.
I speak of peace, while covert enmity
Under the smile of safety wounds the world:

– Shakespeare, *King Henry IV*, Part II, Induction

Upon a warm midsummer Sunday afternoon, shortly after the close of the Great War, I had occasion to pay a visit by automobile to the Sarcee Indian Agency located some twelve miles southwest of Calgary, Alberta. For the return half of my journey the road presented two fairly stiff hills, the first on the north side of Fish Creek valley, in which the agency was situated, and the second, on the north banks of the Elbow River valley, after crossing the Weasel Head bridge.

On the afternoon in question I was making all possible speed along the trail crossing the high ground between the two valleys. The western sky was overcast with inky black cloud; I had no chains for my car wheels with me, and it was essential that I reach the top of the Weasel Head hill before the rain made the surface of the country road slippery.

As I approached the bridge from the south over the Elbow valley flats I passed a large motor car that had just crossed the Weasel Head bridge from the opposite direction. It had drawn off to the side of the road beside a clump of trees, and the passengers, of whom there was a considerable party, were getting out of the car with rugs and picnic baskets, evidently with the intention of having an enjoyable open air meal. Apparently they were not giving the slightest attention to the storm that by now was quite manifestly about to break.

I have often thought that the attitude of these picnickers bore a close analogy to that of the majority of our Canadian people in respect to our foreign relations during the few years up to and immediately preceding the outbreak of the Great War.

To anyone who gave the slightest attention or consideration to the trend of European politics the signs of the great woe that was coming to

the world were unmistakable.¹ He saw Germany with the greatest and most efficient land army in existence, straining every material and financial resource to the utmost in order that a German navy might be created that would rival British sea power. He saw that as early as 1911 this newly created navy had already become a serious menace to the safety of the Empire, and that the British government of the day, fully alive to the threat, had practically withdrawn all capital warships from foreign stations to concentrate the full fighting strength of the fleet around the heart of the Empire – the British Isles. This strategy left naval protection of the Mediterranean largely to France.

Our hypothetical political observer should also have had his interest aroused by the building of several parallel military railroads up to the Belgian frontier in places where there could have been no possible commercial reason for their existence. Several diplomatic “incidents” might also have induced sober reflection in one so inclined; for example, the “man in shining armour” that appeared in support of Austria in that act of the international highwayman, the seizing of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908.² Again, at the time of the Agadir crisis in 1911 one could think that the attitude of Germany might have startled the most unwary.³ There is now little doubt that had the Kiel Canal been completed in 1911 the war would have come then, instead of 1914.⁴

On many occasions prior to the war I discussed the threat of war with friends. Some would agree with me but others, while admitting the evidence, could see no cause for alarm. When such a fact as the great German capital tax for army purposes was cited, they would admit that it was hard to explain but would reiterate their belief that the world

1 While historians would paint a more complex picture of the causes of World War I, McGill provides a vivid explanation, which would have been typical of educated English Canadians. – P B.

2 The “man in shining armour” was Germany’s Chancellor, Prince Bernhard von Bulow.

3 When France moved to occupy Morocco, Germany demanded the French Congo as compensation. France refused, and the German warship *Panther* was dispatched to Agadir in July, 1911, to protect German subjects. On November 4, 1911, France ceded part of its colonies in the Congo in exchange for protectorate status in Morocco. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Fourteenth Edition, s.v. “Morocco: 1911.”

4 The Kiel Canal, built in 1895, connected Kiel, the chief German naval port on the Baltic, with the North Sea. The eight enormous sidings provided within the canal in the June of 1914 enlargement were said to be able to shelter all the ships of the German navy. “Kiel Canal Goes To Denmark If Allies Victorious,” *Edmonton Journal*, 29 September 1914, 12.

was now too civilized for any nation, much less the highly cultured and enlightened German nation, to be considered wicked or foolish enough to be entertaining ideas of world conquest.

Of the war cult and philosophy that had been carefully nurtured in Germany by the support of an extensive literature, our people, on account of the barrier of language, were in almost total ignorance. Outside of this, though, there were all the indications mentioned, plain as the handwriting on the wall.

The great majority of our reading and thinking public were probably vaguely disturbed, but they stubbornly refused to accept the plain evidence sufficient for belief, because they did not wish to believe anything so unpleasant. The consequence was that when in July, 1914, the emergency so clearly perceived by the more discerning did finally emerge, with appalling suddenness, it must have caused the same bewildered consternation as that suffered by the picnickers on that Sunday afternoon in the Elbow River valley.

II THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

Now for the bare-pickt bone of majesty
Doth dogged war bristle his angry crest
And snarleth in the gentle eyes of peace:

– Shakespeare, *King John*, Act IV, Scene III

Upon the outbreak of war the most amazing feature of our national consciousness was, nevertheless, the quick realization by both our government and its people of all the great issues at stake and of the frightful menace that threatened our very existence. I believe there is a simple explanation. For several years a number of public spirited journalists and citizens had persistently drawn attention to the approaching danger, and the effect of their teaching was greater than was apparent. The public was influenced, almost unconsciously. I believe this is why our people, almost unanimously and at once, realized what the situation demanded on our part, and the course it was necessary for our country to take.

All of us who were afterwards participants in the greatest tragedy of all time can recall the final few days of July, 1914 and the mixed feelings of dread and hope with which we watched the rapid development of events. Finally came the historic August 1 when the first units of the German army crossed the Belgian frontier, and every true British subject acutely realized that our Empire must in a few hours declare war or forever abandon the high position she had held in the world for so many centuries. Nothing like such a crisis could be recalled by the memory of anyone then living, and in history one had to go back to the time of Napoleon to find a situation anything like a parallel. All these reflections however can be found much more fully and ably recorded in any good history of the great conflict, and any enlargement would be out of place in a story of personal reminiscences.

When war broke out I was living in the city of Calgary, Alberta, engaged in the practice of medicine. My clearest recollections of the time centre around the occurrences of the evening of August 3. The day had been an exciting one; Britain's ultimatum to Germany had gone forth, and in default of a favourable reply we would be at war when

the clock struck midnight, London time. Every few hours, almost minutes, throughout the day newspaper extras had appeared on the streets. The evening was still and hot, with a haze of smoke from forest fires in the air. Shortly before six Dr. Moshier, afterwards killed at Wancourt in 1918 when Lieut.-Col. in charge of the 11th Canadian Field Ambulance,¹ came into my office, and we discussed the crisis in that grave and weighty manner usually affected by those whose interest and enthusiasm far exceed their knowledge.

We each had a nodding acquaintance with the defence forces of Canada: Moshier was a captain in the Canadian Army Medical Corps, C.A.M.C., non-permanent, while I had served a year as a junior officer with the rank of lieutenant in the 103rd Calgary Rifles under the command of Lieut.-Col. W. C. Armstrong. I also had done a little rifle shooting.

Each of us considered himself a finished tactician, and between us we had little difficulty in devising and laying down satisfactory dispositions of the naval and military forces of the Empire as well as those of France and Russia. In fact we felt that the position of the allies was somewhat weakened by the fact that we were not nearer the ear of Marshall Joffre.² When it came to an outline of our own course of action we were not so positive, although we had no other idea than to get into the struggle in some capacity at the earliest possible moment. When we had finished our discussion on the most complete and scientific arrangement of the allied forces, and had come to some conclusion as to the length of the war and probable nature of the campaigns in which we expected to engage, we retired to a nearby restaurant for dinner. When we returned to the street the newspapers were out announcing the British declaration of war, and on the bulletin board of the *Calgary Herald* was posted the text of His Majesty's solemn and stirring message to the Grand Fleet.³

1 While stalled in traffic enroute to reconnoitre his next field ambulance site, Lieut.-Col. Heber Havelock Moshier and the driver of the ambulance car in which he was riding were killed, August 28, by a shell fired from a long-range gun, the target being determined from an aeroplane. A. E. Snell, *The C.A.M.C. with the Canadian Corps During the Last Hundred Days of the Great War* (Ottawa: F.A. Acland, 1924), 114. Lieut.-Col. Moshier, formerly professor of physiology at the University of Alberta Medical Faculty, was officially mentioned in Sir Douglas Haig's dispatches in the spring of 1918.

2 General Joseph Joffre, Commander-in-chief of the French army.

3 "I have confidence that the British Fleet will revive the old glories of the navy. I am sure that the navy will again shield Britain in this hour of trial. It will prove the bulwark of the Empire." "Message from England's King," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 5 August 1914, 9.

During the days immediately following, most of us were down town early each morning to get the first news of the expected great naval battle, a battle that took place in a modified form only some two years later. As the days passed by and nothing of the kind happened we were somewhat disappointed, but also at the same time reassured, for many of us had an unexpressed fear that the Germans might possess some secret development of their submarines that was capable of overcoming the British sea supremacy. The war news seemed fairly satisfactory. We were all enthused by the gallant resistance of Belgium, and cheered by the German check at Liège which we later knew was scarcely a check at all. The naval raid into Heligoland Bight was a heartening incident, for it showed that the British fleet was alive and active and had lost nothing of its traditional fighting spirit.⁴ It also showed that the enemy probably lacked anything revolutionary in the way of submarine power. This, as I have said, had been an obsession in the minds of many, for otherwise it seemed scarcely credible that the Germans would have had the temerity to accept all the consequences of the mighty strength of British sea power thrown in the scale against them.

However they had staked their all upon the Von Schlieffen Plan⁵ of the immediate crushing of France by invasion through Belgium, and were so certain of success that they apparently disregarded all other factors.

Nothing could have been finer at this trying period than the temper and spirit of the Canadian people. Many there were, no doubt, that did not know the extent of the menace with which we were faced, but all accepted the situation that we were at war and that all must put forth the fullest effort in the common cause. We have heard a lot since of our boys going to war to end war for all time to come. Personally I was never actuated by any such abstract idea, and I doubt very much if the idea ever occurred to a single one of the thousands who enlisted during the early months of the war. It seems to me that men went to war for the same instinctive reason that would induce them to grab a club if attacked by a savage animal, or to pick up a bucket of water or hose if fire broke out in the house. Later, some of them may have thought

4 The British sank three German cruisers and one destroyer without the loss of a ship.

5 Count Alfred von Schlieffen, the German chief of staff, devised a Franco-Russian war plan whereby the German army corps, less a few divisions deployed to stall the slow-moving Russians, would utilize rail and road routes across Belgium and northern France to strike a swift and decisive blow at Paris while avoiding entrenched French positions in the northeast. Desmond Morton and J. L. Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War 1914-1919* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1988), 4.

that they had joined the colours on account of the “abolish war” idea because of the appealing nature of the ideal; but, as I have said, I have the strongest doubt that a single soldier ever enlisted from this motive.

Before the month of August had ended recruiting for the first Canadian contingent was in progress. I believe that the first men to leave Calgary consisted of a draft for the P.P.C.L.I., all ex-service men.⁶ Of course there was a keen competition to become attached to the first units likely to leave Canada, for it was confidently expected that the war would be won and over before it could be possible for many troops from Canada to reach the scene of action. Even in this early stage of the conflict, the most uninformed in matters military recognized that any forces raised in Canada would require months of training before being ready to meet the highly disciplined and effective army of the enemy. In the meantime Dr. Moshier and I were kept from the effects of impatience by being employed in the medical examination of recruits who were being sent to join the mobilization camp at Valcartier.

And the mention of Valcartier brings up a question. Why did the Honourable Sam Hughes,⁷ then Minister of Militia, throw into the discard all the carefully prepared plans of mobilization on file in his department? The standing organization of the defence forces of Canada was not elaborate in detail but good of its kind. It was based upon a non-permanent volunteer militia directed by a small but efficient body of professional soldiers. The country was divided, as it now is, into a number of military districts each in command of a senior officer known as the District Officer Commanding. The D.O.C. was assisted by a Headquarters Staff composed of professional officers and non-commissioned officers.

I have been informed that the Department of Militia had an excellent scheme of mobilization, well adapted to the needs and limitations of the country, which had been carefully prepared by a former chief of staff, Sir Colin MacKenzie, an officer who later attained high distinction in the war as a general of division.

6 This draft for the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, a force being privately raised for British service by Montreal businessman Hamilton Gault, departed Calgary 1:45 p.m., August 14, 1914.

7 For a remarkably sympathetic portrayal of this remarkable – and controversial – Canadian politician, see Ronald G. Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885–1916* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986). – P. B.

Instead of putting this carefully prepared plan into execution and using the existing non-permanent military units as depot units for recruiting and training, Hughes, later Sir Sam Hughes, jettisoned the whole business and proceeded to raise entirely new units for overseas service, thus breaking the chain of regimental tradition, an important factor in the maintenance of the military spirit. Many of the existing Canadian militia units had a long and glorious history, and it does seem a pity that this could not have been carried forward. Perhaps Sir Sam was like Cicero and would never consent to follow what other men began.

During the early days of the war the newspapers were filled with news of the German raiding cruisers and their exploits, and also the welcome news of their destruction, one after the other. Particularly acceptable was the story of the sinking of the *Emden* by the Australian cruiser *Sydney*.⁸ The whole world seemed given up to the god of war, and each day brought the news of military operations and battles in remote corners of the earth, the geographical names of which had been previously unknown to the public. We learned of the existence of such a place as Togoland. We heard of the New Zealand expedition to Samoa and that of Australia to German New Guinea. We read of naval duels fought in various parts of the Seven Seas, including the fight of the *Carmania* in West Indian waters and the exploit of the *Highflyer* off the west coast of Africa. Japan declared war upon Germany and besieged the German Chinese naval station at Kiaochow. We had news of the rebellion in South Africa, battles in the Cameroons and feverish preparations in every continent of the globe. The situation resembled that described by Macaulay concerning the Seven Years War.⁹ In a passage referring to Frederick the Great he wrote that in order that the Prussian King might rob a neighbour that he had sworn to defend, black men fought on the coast of Coromandel and red men scalped each other by the Great Lakes of North America.

Meanwhile the main theatre of war in Europe held the chief interest of the anxious public. The Battle of the Marne had yet to be fought, and we all watched with the most intense apprehension the steady sweep of

8 During August and September the *Emden*, a German light cruiser used as a commerce raider in the Far East, had sunk or captured nineteen British merchant ships. On November 9, while attempting to destroy a radio station on the Cocos Keeling Islands, she was forced ashore by the *Sydney* and surrendered, after losing 111 men.

9 A war fought from 1756 to 1763 between a coalition of Austria, France, Russia, Sweden and Saxony against Prussia and Britain.

the mighty German army through Belgium and northwestern France. To offset these unfavourable reports we were cheered somewhat by news from the Russian front, although our hopes and expectations of the so-called “Steam Roller” were never fully realized. We heard full accounts of the Russian victory over the Austrians at Lemberg but very little concerning the crushing defeat sustained by our Allies at Tannenberg at the hands of the redoubtable Hindenburg. Great a triumph as this action was for German arms, it was bought at a fearful price, for it required the withdrawal of three army corps from the Western front at a most critical phase of the carrying out of the famous long prepared plan of Marshall von Schlieffen. I have heard well informed military men say that von Schlieffen must have turned in his grave¹⁰ when this modification of his plan was made, for, as after events proved, this compromise meant the total failure of the whole scheme and the ultimate loss of the war by the Central powers.

However in early September these events of the near future cast no shadows before, and as the German army approached Paris all our hearts were filled with sickening fear. I well remember one dreadful Sunday when a local Calgary paper published an extra with the most startling and terrifying headlines to the effect that the enemy was at the gates of Paris and that it was necessary for Canada to raise 400,000 troops at once. Even in the dazed mental condition from which most of us suffered owing to the rapid succession of tremendous events we realized the utter absurdity of the latter announcement.

Then came the wonderful news of the Battle of the Marne and everyone breathed more easily. We now knew that the great German plan to force a sudden decision had failed and that there would probably be time for the Allied powers to mobilize their forces. The Battle of the Marne has been reckoned as the decisive battle of the Great War, and it will likely be set down in history as such.¹¹

10 Von Schlieffen died on January 4, 1913.

11 The Battle of the Marne lasted from September 5 to 10. When the over-extended German army stalled within twenty-five miles of Paris, and the city's capture was no longer imminent, General Joffre abandoned his plan to retreat from Paris and rallied every available French soldier for an attack on the enemy's exposed flank. Casualties were appalling, but the German troops withdrew to the River Aisne. Paris was saved, and Germany's hope for a quick end to the war ended. Jay Winter and Blaine Baggett, *The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 83.

When war first broke out our people spoke of the Canadian Contingent apparently with the idea that the troops assembled at Valcartier would be all that Canada would be able to send or that would be required from this country. As events shaped themselves however we began to realize that we were in for a long struggle, although Lord Kitchener's estimate of three years duration was looked upon as unduly pessimistic.¹² During October the troops were moved from Valcartier¹³ to England, and preparations were made to raise troops throughout Canada to train here during the winter months. Among the units authorized was the 31st Battalion Canadian Infantry to be recruited in the Province of Alberta.

12 Herbert Horatio Kitchener (1850–1916), Field Marshall and British Minister of War, 1914–1916.

13 The initial training of the first Canadian Contingent was carried out at this hastily improvised camp at Valcartier, near Quebec City. – P B.

III MOBILIZATION

Hark! I hear the tramp of thousands,
And of armed men the hum;
Lo! a nation's hosts have gathered
Round the quick-alarms drum, –
Saying: "Come,
Freemen, come!
Ere your heritage be wasted," said the
quick-alarms drum.

"Let me of my heart take counsel:
War is not of life the sum;
Who shall stay and reap the harvest
When the autumn days shall come?"
But the drum
Echoed: "Come!
Death shall reap the braver harvest," said
the solemn-sounding drum.

– Bret Harte, *The Reveille*

One evening while I was examining recruits at the old 103rd armouries, the District Officer Commanding, Colonel Ernest Cruickshank, spoke to me and asked how long it would take me to arrange my private affairs in order to join the army. When I told him that a day would suffice he informed me, much to my delight, that he had chosen me for the medical officer, or M.O., of the unit about to be mobilized.

My own course and sphere of action in the Great War was now defined and determined. Although the unit which I was about to join was yet unborn, I felt much elated that I had an assurance of a chance to play an active part in the great drama. I already felt a sense of pride in that gallant "band of brothers" with whom I was to go so far and see so much, and with whom I was to be closely associated in their great achievements, their sorrows and their sufferings.

The 31st Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, as it was first designated, was a representative Alberta unit, recruited from all parts of the province. Recruiting was advertised to begin November 16, 1914, and actually did begin on that date at various centres throughout the province.

In order to provide personnel for guard duties during the process of recruiting in Calgary, it was necessary to enlist a certain number of men on Saturday the 14th, a day when a heavy snow storm ended a spell of fine, open weather. For this purpose 34 men were examined in an office in the Grain Exchange Building. Of these 30 were attested¹ and 4 rejected for reasons of medical unfitness. These 30 formed the nucleus of the rank and file of the battalion. The officers had previously received their provisional appointments. I was to be medical officer with the rank of lieutenant.

The morning of November 16 was very cold, ten degrees below zero. Recruiting had been advertised to begin at the battalion quarters in the Exhibition Buildings, Victoria Park. We found the place too cold for the purpose so shifted the location to the 103rd armouries on 15th Avenue East, the place we had previously used for recruiting the drafts going forward to the mobilization camp at Valcartier. Major Hewetson and I conducted the medical examinations. Hundreds of men were waiting to be examined and attested, most of them well dressed and many wearing expensive fur-lined overcoats.

At this time there was much unemployment in Calgary; and to settle a point for myself I did something for which I had no authority but which often gave me satisfaction in later years. As each prospective recruit was giving his particulars, name, age, etc., I asked him whether or not he was out of work. Of the 240 examined this first day only 28 gave a history of being out of employment. Very often, during and since the war, I have quoted these figures in answer to the mean and cowardly slander contained in the statement often made that those enlisting in the early stages of the war did so for the sake of a meal ticket. This abominable

1 Medical examination requirements: (1) sufficiently intelligent; (2) speech without impediment; (3) capacious chest (33" for ages 18-30; 34" for ages 30-45); (4) sound heart and lungs; (5) well-formed limbs; (6) free and perfect motion of all joints; (7) 18 to 45 years of age; (8) 5 feet tall for infantry, 5 feet 4 inches for artillery; (9) may have one or two missing toes but great toe must be intact; (10) can hear an ordinary voice at 10 feet in each ear. David W. Love, *A Call to Arms: The Organization and Administration of Canada's Military in World War I* (Winnipeg and Calgary: Bunker to Bunker Books, 1999), 57-58.

remark was frequently made at a later date by men who for reasons best known to themselves had no thought of encountering the discomforts and hazards of war, and who chose for their own excuse the vilification of men better and braver than themselves.

More than a score of years have passed away since that cold November morning, years filled with some of the most stirring events of history; and yet I can still remember with wonderful clarity little incidents of our work. I can recall, for instance, examining one man who was trying to get by with a glass eye. It was a good glass eye too, and I think I might not have detected it if the possessor had taken the precaution to memorize the letters on the test type card. There were a number of rejections but not a large percentage. Many were turned away on account of dental defects, varicose veins and defective vision.² Many of the two former classes went at once to have the necessary corrective treatment in order to present themselves later. They were sent to various dental and surgical practitioners who did the work gratis or at a very low rate.

Would-be humourists of the time made very merry over the insistence of the medical officers upon satisfactory dental equipment on the part of the recruit. The favourite quip was that the soldier was not expected to bite the enemy. The retort is that while neither is he expected to kick his antagonist, it is nevertheless necessary that he have good feet. And, indeed, a considerable number of rejections were by reason of defective feet.

As recruits were passed "fit" and attested, they were assigned to a squad and marched over to the Exhibition Grounds where the Exhibition Buildings had been prepared for their reception by the Canadian Engineers Corps under the command of Lieut.-Col. Paul Wetherbee. Recruiting continued for several days, being completed during the week except for 10% reinforcements.

During this week recruiting had also been going on at several other Alberta centres: Edmonton, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Wetaskiwin, Pincher Creek, High River, McLeod and Youngstown. Within a few days drafts from these outside points arrived and completed the establishment of personnel. The old exhibition buildings were not entirely suitable for barrack room purposes. The buildings allowed only about 300 cubic feet air space, just half the regulation requirement.

2 Other grounds for rejection were: tuberculosis; heart palpitation (murmur); stammering; chronic ulcers; defective intelligence; abnormal spinal curvature; traces of corporal punishment; hernia; inveterate cutaneous disease. Love, *A Call to Arms*, 57-58.

The floors were in very bad shape and difficult to keep in a clean and sanitary condition. The same might be said of the inside woodwork. Ventilation was fairly well provided by side windows in the cupola that ran from end to end of each building but, as before mentioned, the air space was deficient.

The 31st Battalion was first organized upon the eight company system, but this soon changed to the four company arrangement. As finally organized, A Company was formed largely by men from Calgary and Youngstown. B Company was composed of men from Medicine Hat, Red Deer and Wetaskiwin. The personnel of C Company came from Calgary, High River, Claresholm, McLeod and Pincher Creek. The men of D Company were furnished largely from Edmonton and Lethbridge.

The battalion orderly room was established in an office at the west end of the horse show building. Quartermaster stores were located in the lower storey of the arts building. The officers' mess and sleeping quarters for sixteen officers were in the same building, upstairs over the stores. The sergeants' mess was on the ground floor adjoining the quartermaster stores. The sergeants however slept with the men in the converted stables.

Barrack rooms for the men consisted of nine converted stables, one for each half company and one for headquarters staff details. Both the officers' mess and orderly room were supplied with running water. Kitchens were provided in one end of each barrack room and a shower bath was placed at the other end. Running water was also laid on the ablution tables. Heating was by natural gas and lighting by electricity.

Following the end of recruiting, I had to adjust myself to my new and unfamiliar position as medical officer to an infantry battalion. This position was a somewhat anomalous and ill-defined one. I had to rely almost entirely upon my own professional resources and my very limited knowledge of army medical procedure. There was no superior authority in the Army Medical Corps nearer than Military District 10 in Winnipeg to whom I could apply for orders, advice or assistance, so I studied official regulations assiduously. I read eagerly the publication, Royal Army Medical Corps Training and even consulted Field Service Regulations. All the information I could obtain was of little help to me in my present difficulties. The directions set out applied to an established order of things, and not to the circumstances of a unit in the formative stage, and for the time being, in a position almost independent, unhampered and unaided by a higher authority. For instance, it did me no good to learn

that I should indent upon the nearest army medical stores for my medical supplies when there were no medical stores here in Military District 13. Directions to have the sick marched for admission to the military hospital by a non-commissioned officer, or N.C.O., helped little when there was no military hospital within a thousand miles.

My reading and study, although of little immediate help in the solution of my more urgent problems, were nevertheless of considerable value to me in my work. I learned that when a soldier was admitted to hospital or sent to court martial his medical history sheet must accompany him, and thus discovered for the first time that such a document as a medical history sheet was in existence. I also discovered a section in King's Regulations and Orders providing for the discharge, without formality, within three months of enlistment of a man who, for any reason, was unlikely to become an efficient soldier. I saw at once that this valuable provision would enable the battalion to get shut of a number of men who had been enlisted with obvious physical defects. Should they be retained longer than three months, it would be necessary for the unit to hold medical boards, question of pension would arise, and all sorts of difficulties would lie in the way. I took Major Hewgill, the second in command, into my confidence, and it is only fair to say that between us we availed ourselves of the advantage of this valuable section, to the utmost.

In providing and laying out the quarters of the unit the Battalion Quartermaster had apparently overlooked or disregarded the necessity of a medical inspection room, for none had been provided. For the first week or two I held sick parade in one of the barrack rooms, a most unsatisfactory arrangement. Finally two small rooms were fitted up under the old grandstand, adjoining the canteen. These rooms were provided with running water and sanitary conveniences and proved quite suitable in spite of the restricted space.

No surgical instruments had been provided and I was obliged to provide my own "without cost to the public." The latter phrase is one, by the way, with which I became quite familiar early on and throughout my military career. For the first week I also depended upon my own emergency tablet case for the necessary drugs. Finally District Headquarters entered into an arrangement with Oliver Brothers Drug Company of Calgary for supplies of drugs and dressings, and the service of this firm was excellent. I continued to use my own instruments throughout our stay in Calgary and even used my own instruments in the

hospital. When I went overseas I left these in the Holy Cross Hospital and found them carefully retained for me when I returned over four years later. About this time District Headquarters also contracted with the Holy Cross Hospital for the admission and care of our hospital cases. No medical officer was appointed for hospital duty, so I followed and attended my own cases.

The first hospital case to be admitted was Private Cowgill who was sent in with tonsillitis towards the end of November. This man afterwards developed rheumatic fever and was discharged medically unfit. The second case admitted was one of epilepsy, also discharged later as unfit for active service.

A number of men, medically unfit, began to show up when hard squad drill was instituted. A considerable percentage of these men came from one particular recruiting point where sufficient care had not been taken with medical examinations. As these men appeared they were discharged under the section of King's Regulations and Orders already mentioned. The Dominion of Canada must now be paying a pretty annual bill in the way of pensions for men who should never have been taken on the army strength in the first place, and who never saw the firing line.

The large majority of the cases admitted to hospital were those of tonsillitis, and rheumatism followed as a sequel in a considerable number. This continued throughout the winter, and I think might have been attributable, in part, to the close unsanitary quarters. I recommended that the insides of all buildings be lime-washed and this was done. However no appreciable diminution was noticed in the number of men reporting sick. Cases of venereal disease were very few.

Scarlet fever made its appearance in the early part of December, and the battalion did not get rid of it until the unit left Calgary in May, 1915. Nearly all the cases came from one barrack room, No. 16, occupied by the left half of B Company. After each case appeared the floors and woodwork were all thoroughly gone over with cresol solution. Fumigation was considered futile and was not done. Single cases continued to appear at intervals of ten days or two weeks throughout the winter, there being fourteen in all. Only two were of a severe type.

Inoculation against typhoid or enteric fever, that fearful scourge of armies in the past, was begun on December 8, Ontario Board of Health vaccine being used. I was assisted in this work by Major Hewetson, C.A.M.C. Two inoculations were given ten days apart, 500 million dead bacilli being given in the first dose and one billion in the second. The

treatment was not refused in any case by either man or officer. We used the ordinary hypodermic syringes with half a dozen needles each. We kept a dish of boiling water on a spirit stove and fished out a freshly sterilized needle for each injection. No bad results occurred in any of those inoculated. Each man done was excused from duty for 24 hours. The work was completed by the end of 1914 except for the new recruits taken on the strength from time to time.

During the month of December recruiting was reopened in Calgary and Edmonton to bring the strength of the unit ten per cent above establishment for the purpose of providing for a first reinforcement. Besides this we were taking on recruits singly or in small groups throughout the winter to replace those discharged for various reasons. Some of our best soldiers were secured in this way, for we had the time and opportunity to make careful selections. There was the keenest competition for these vacancies in our establishment. Often an officer or a man had a friend that he was particularly anxious to have enlisted, and we tried to meet these wishes in so far as was possible. Occasionally, however, this influence was exercised on behalf of someone with a slight physical defect although desirable in every other way. In dealing with these cases I remember that the interests of the service must have first consideration and personal reasons none at all.

I was very fortunate in one respect: I was attached to a battalion commanded by a professional soldier, and one that thoroughly understood not only his own particular business, but who had an exact appreciation of the position and duties of the medical officer. I clearly remember discussing this question with him; i.e., the one of would-be recruits with influence and physical defects. Lieut.-Col. Bell said to me:

Do not allow any factors to induce you to take an action contrary to the dictates of your own judgment and conscience. In many long years of military life my experience has taught me that a soldier who does so spends the balance of his career in making a series of errors, each in the vain attempt to correct the one immediately preceding, and all resulting from his first violation of sound practice.

I have never forgotten this excellent advice, and have it stored away in my memory with many another precept furnished me by our wise and well beloved Commanding Officer. I think that the only man physically defective that we were obliged to take on our strength was a friend of

the Honourable Sam Hughes. This man lacked vision in one eye, but we were compelled to enlist him upon the direct order of the head of Canada's defence forces.

Another factor influencing recruiting was a preposterous general order issued during the winter which allowed a man to withdraw from the army upon payment of fifteen dollars. What the purpose of this may have been the Lord only knows, but its effect could not possibly have been other than the subversion of discipline; and indeed so it was. Whenever a man of delicate sensibilities was addressed sharply by an N.C.O. the offended soldier likely as not paid his fifteen dollars and withdrew from His Majesty's forces with flags flying and honour satisfied.

The battalion stretcher bearer section was organized during the first month in barracks, and a very desirable class of men was secured. Changes in personnel were afterwards made, but most of those first chosen remained. All were volunteers. Private P. Willis, medical officer's orderly, began special duty on November 18, and Lance Corporal T. Bright on November 26. From the beginning difficulty was experienced through lack of sick report forms, and during most of the winter the orderly sergeants ruled out their own. The orderly room was provided with a morning hospital sick state along with the usual daily sick state. When the necessity of medical history sheets was discovered a supply was obtained, and the whole battalion medically re-examined. Necessary particulars from this examination and the attestation papers³ were then entered upon the medical history sheets. This entailed much hard work, but the result was satisfying as we were able to weed out several medically unfit.

To each infantry battalion there were attached five C.A.M.C. details, in charge of a corporal, for duties in connection with the water supply of the unit when in the field. A difficulty arose regarding the enlistment of these men as there was no depot in Military District 13 from which they could be drawn. The problem was overcome by taking five men picked for the purpose on the strength of the battalion and having them transferred later to the Canadian Army Medical Corps at which time new regimental numbers were allotted them. The five men so enlisted were: Robert Hardie, A. F. Collin, W. G. Given, G. Moorehead, and G. P.

3 Attestation papers can be found in the National Library and Archives of Canada under "Soldiers of the First World War – Canadian Expeditionary Force," http://www.collectionscanada.ca/archivianet/020106_e.html.

Macqualter. Moorehead afterwards transferred to another unit and Private Thwaites was transferred from the battalion to take his place. These men received their training partly with the stretcher bearer section and partly with the section of the field ambulance in charge of Captain J. N. Gunn, afterwards Lieut.-Col. Gunn, D.S.O.,⁴ then training in Calgary.

During the first few months of my experience as medical officer of the battalion I worked harder, much harder, than for any considerable time on active service overseas, except for short periods of intense activity during a general engagement. The unit was going through the process of organization and training. I was alone with between one thousand and eleven hundred men under my care. The only help I received was from Major Hewetson during the inoculation and vaccination of the personnel, and the necessary assistance of other medical officers in the performance of surgical operations in the hospital. The taking of the daily morning sick parade was really one of my minor duties for there were new recruits to be examined nearly every day with the necessary documents to be made out. All new recruits had to be inoculated and vaccinated and the necessary entries made on their medical history sheets. Private Willis proved an excellent medical officer's orderly and kept an accurate accounting of these various items and the dates when inoculation and vaccination were due.

Training the stretcher bearers in drill and first aid took considerable time, although for a while we had Sergeant-Major Sparrow, C.A.M.C., attached to the unit to give stretcher drill and instruction. He rendered valuable help. I was required to give lectures to the officers on military sanitation, and also to all the platoons on the subject of first aid. While lecturing the latter I did not go into the close detail that I did in my training of the stretcher bearers.

Ordinarily a medical officer attached to a combatant unit does not follow his patients to the hospital and treat them there. However as this seemed to be expected of me, I carried out the program. From a professional point of view this system made the work much more interesting to me, but it entailed a lot of heavy work and worry. During the greater part of the winter I had patients in both the Isolation and Holy Cross Hospitals, and I found it necessary to make one or more visits to each

4 The Distinguished Service Order was an award granted to officers, sometimes for particular actions in combat, other times for cumulative leadership.

place each day. The daily number in hospital averaged between twenty and thirty, half of whom, at least, were suffering from tonsillitis.

Every morning after breakfast, when work incidental to the early sick parade was completed, I walked across Victoria Park to the North-West gate and followed the route along 18th Avenue and 2nd Street West to the Holy Cross Hospital. Before many days I began to take notice of a little boy, four or five years of age, who played by himself in the front yard of a house on the south side of the avenue. As I passed by on the sidewalk this little chap would desist from play, come to attention, face the sidewalk at right angle and solemnly salute in a perfect manner. I would always acknowledge his salute. One morning I stopped to speak to him and ask who taught him to salute an army officer in uniform. He told me that his mother had instructed him to do so. I have many times regretted that I did not obtain his name. If he still lives he will be a full grown man now, and probably has children of his own. I wonder if he remembers the mornings in the winter of 1914-1915 when he took time off from his play to pay his respects to His Majesty's uniform.

Four pneumonia cases occurred during the winter. One of these was mild and the other three severe. Two of the latter, namely Private Fisher and Private Campbell, were rendered unfit for further military service. Fisher was desperately ill and District Headquarters gave me permission to employ a special nurse for him in hospital. Private Campbell's case, which occurred in the spring, was an interesting one. The onset was very acute, simulating that of a perforated peptic ulcer. The man collapsed on parade with intense abdominal pain and vomiting. When I first saw him in the barrack room whence he had been carried he had a normal temperature and no cough. All his pain was referred to the upper abdomen which was as hard as a board. I had him admitted to hospital at once. Cough did not appear until the second day but before that time signs of pneumonia were manifest in the chest. He went in for emphysema, a collection of pus in the pleural cavity. On the fourteenth day of his illness I removed two inches of a rib to provide drainage. When the battalion left Calgary in May, he was safely convalescent in hospital.

Only two fractures occurred during the period of the battalion training in Calgary, one of the wrist and one of a leg. Both patients made good recoveries and remained with the unit. There was one dislocation of the shoulder. The victim was Web, a groom, who was thrown from his horse. He was able to return to duty in three weeks.

Three men sustained ruptures during physical training. I operated upon all three with the assistance of Captain G. R. Johnson, M.O. of the

12th Mounted Rifles. One operation was rather difficult but the patient made a good recovery upon which he promptly deserted, and was heard of no more. The other two went overseas with the unit. One of them, Beach, a splendid boy from Medicine Hat, was killed by a trench mortar bomb⁵ a year later in front of Kemmel, Belgium. Westcott, the other, went through the war and I believe returned safely to Canada. He was the same man that had had the Colle's fracture of the wrist.

No deaths occurred in the battalion prior to its leaving Canada. During the late winter and early spring an epidemic of a mild type of mumps appeared in barracks, about a dozen cases in all. Most of them reported, not for the original illness, but for a certain sequel that sometimes follows this disease.⁶ It was noticeable that minor cuts and scratches were liable to become infected in barracks.

My story is beginning to read like an article in a medical journal, but I have only one other observation to record. For almost five months I had some eleven hundred men under my care, and in all that time I did not see a single case of acute appendicitis or anything that even faintly resembled that disease.

The foregoing is a recorded fact of some value in medical history, for it raises the question as to why appendicitis should be so much rarer in barracks than among the civil population. It is to be remembered also that appendicitis commonly occurs most frequently among young adults of precisely the age group constituting by far the majority of those in the army. Were I to cite this record taken from civil practice, I should probably be told promptly that the reason I had no cases to record was not because there were none, but because I failed to recognize them. This argument, however it might apply to other circumstances, could have no application to the conditions of army practice; for if I had missed any such cases in the unit, the fact must certainly have come to light. After making all allowances for the regular life regimen of the soldier having a preventive effect upon the onset of appendicitis, I was driven to the conclusion that I had long suspected: appendicitis is a disease diagnosed entirely too often, and this in spite of the fact that it is really a very common malady.

5 A mortar was a metal tube used in trenches for throwing heavy charges of high explosives a short distance along a high-arc trajectory.

6 Inflammation of the testes.

IV LIFE IN BARRACKS

Let our just censures
Attend the true event, and put we on
Industrious soldiership.

– Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene IV

Up to this point my recorded reminiscences have been concerned chiefly with my particular interest in the activities of the unit to which I was attached. This interest, although of very considerable importance, doubtless bulked larger in my own view than its relative position in the life of the battalion justified. I have often thought since of what a remarkable metamorphosis took place during the first few months we were in training at the Calgary fair grounds, and of what an ambitious undertaking it was to attempt to transform more than a thousand officers and men into a fighting unit capable of confronting the trained legions of Imperial Germany. A few of the officers, including the commanding officer, had seen active service, and this applied also to a number of the N.C.O.s and men. Practically all of the aforementioned had some training in the active militia of Canada, but real soldiering was new to most of us.

The 31st Battalion was under the command of Lieut.-Col. Arthur Henry Bell, in later years, Major-General A. H. Bell, C.M.G.,¹ D.S.O, Adjutant-General of Canada. Although in early middle life he was a seasoned veteran of many campaigns, including the South African War. More recently, as District Staff Adjutant of Military District No.13 he became thoroughly acquainted with the business of soldiering and familiar with all the details and requirements of training. He very soon acquired the confidence, respect and esteem of all ranks, which he never lost in the slightest degree during any of the tragic ordeals through which the 31st Battalion passed in the bloody years that followed.

The officers, all provisionally appointed, came from different parts of the province. Uniforms had been supplied to the men at once, so from

1 The C.M.G., Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, was awarded to British subjects for services abroad or in the British Empire.

the beginning they made a fairly smart appearance on parade. The same could not be said of the officers. Many of us had no uniform of any kind and were forced to perform our military duties in mufti. Although a few of the officers did possess regulation dress, the majority turned out in all sorts of military attire. During those first few weeks of training it seemed that almost every arm of the service in the British Empire was represented in the attire of our officers on parade. Certainly “uniform” was not a term that could be applied with any justice to the dress of our officers during those early days of training.

When the 31st Battalion was first authorized and mobilization begun, it was the opinion of many of those acquainted with military affairs that a second division would be the extent of Canada’s contribution to the fighting forces of the Allies. However, it became apparent very soon that much greater efforts must be made by this country, and authorization was issued for the raising of many more units throughout the country. Among those so authorized during the closing weeks of 1914 there were several in Alberta, including the 50th Infantry and 12th Mounted Rifles in Calgary, the 49th Infantry and the 51st Infantry in Edmonton, and the 3rd Mounted Rifles of Medicine Hat. The mobilization of these new units wrought quite a change in our original establishment of officers, for many transferred or were posted to the more recent formations. Naturally we lost several of our Edmonton officers to the new units forming there. However, two of our most popular members of the officers’ mess, Major Hewgill who became second in command, and Captain Ross Palmer, our genial paymaster, decided to remain with the 31st Battalion and did so until almost the conclusion of the war.

Fortunately these changes took place early, before the original battalion had properly settled down, and consequently the disruption was not as serious as it might have been at a later date. The officers who departed were replaced largely by promotion from the ranks of our own unit, and indeed, we had an abundance of good material for officers in the making. Several attained high distinction later in the war.

Officers of the battalion, some from Calgary and some from out of town, soon occupied the sleeping quarters provided in the officers’ mess upstairs over the Quartermaster’s stores in the Exhibition Arts Building. Among the former, I included myself, for I found it was practically necessary for me to live and sleep within sound of the bugle. There was scarcely an evening that passed free from a call for me to render service of some kind within the military area. This statement applied even more to the time when other units were also within the bounds of the Exhi-

bition Grounds. As the only medical officer that slept in the battalion mess, and with no garrison organization in place, I was, for practical purposes, the permanent orderly medical officer.

When the day's duties were done, most of the officers living in the mess, not on orderly or other duty, left for the evening. As for myself, I usually was too tired at the end of the day to feel like going out, so as a rule spent my evenings in the mess. There were usually a few others remaining, and the evenings were passed largely in conversation and reading. As I recall our methods of spending the hours off duty I find myself surprised at the very little time we spent at bridge. We had the occasional game, but did not indulge to anything like the extent we did later when on active service. One reason for our abstinence may have been that most of us had a considerable amount of professional reading and study to do. On the whole, the life we led was not devoid of interest and pleasure; and this despite, or possibly because of, long hours and hard work.

Since the war, the place of our old battalion mess has been reconverted to its original purpose, and at every Calgary Exhibition is devoted to the display of a collection of pictures possessing more or less artistic merit. I have visited it several times during Exhibition week, but I must say that my stay has always been of the shortest. I do not think that I shall ever go again. Each time I have felt a severe catch about the heart. The pictures I have seen were not those covering the walls, but a clear and vivid mental picture of the old quarters as they were during the winter of 1914-15, and of many a face once familiar to me as we sat in mess or talked together in the ante room. Many of these faces I shall never see again, and it gives me a feeling of unutterable sadness and loneliness to revisit the scenes of our many happy evenings when we were training for war and before we were called upon to face its stern realities.

Even without a visit to our old quarters I have only to close my eyes in order to recall many a scene about the old mess. As if it were yesterday, I can see Lieutenant P. G. Tofft walking down the corridor and pausing outside the door of a room wherein he could hear the sound of voices or the clink of glasses. Very politely Tofft would tap on the door, and, when bidden to enter, would merely thrust in his head and shoulders, asking in the most courtly tone, "Gentlemen, may I be permitted to become your guest?"

Tofft was always welcome and thoroughly appreciated any proffered hospitality. He was a Dane by birth. He had been in the Mounted Police and I believe possessed a military education obtained in his mother

country.² At any rate we all had great respect for his military knowledge, especially in respect to matters of mess propriety and of general military deportment and etiquette. He was by many years the oldest of the subalterns,³ and by a strange irony of fate was the first to die in action. Tofft took his position as an officer with the utmost earnestness and was a striking and likable character. Rightly or wrongly I have always thought of him in connection with the appellation, "soldier of the old school," whatever that phrase may mean.

Tofft was a subaltern of C Company, and his particular pal was an officer of the same company, Lieutenant P. B. R. Tucker, a bank manager in civilian life. More fortunate than his friend Tofft, he survived the war after becoming a casualty on several occasions. He left the army with the rank of major and returned to his original profession of banking. He was shot down in cold blood by bandits when a branch of the Dominion Bank was robbed in Winnipeg, May 8, 1931. I first heard of Tucker's tragic death while I was on a visit to Edmonton. I bought an evening paper at the Macdonald Hotel and with shock and grief read of the atrocious murder of one who had been my close friend throughout the war and up to the time of his death.

As I write I cannot recall exactly who slept in the mess and who had quarters outside. Almost all single officers took their meals in mess, and of course all officers dined there on special occasions such as guest night. After the 50th Battalion and 12th Mounted Rifles were mobilized a Garrison mess was established. On Sunday afternoons we had teas to which the officers were privileged to invite ladies. These little parties became quite popular and we even had an occasional afternoon tea during the week. On one occasion it was our pleasure to entertain the famous actor, Sir Johnstone Forbes Robertson⁴ who was playing in Calgary at the time.

2 Lieut. Paul George Tofft had served in the Royal Dutch Army. When he enlisted in the 31st Battalion he was forty-three years of age and a clerk in the Supreme Court.

3 Junior officers with the rank of First or Second Lieutenant.

4 The afternoon tea hosted by the officers of the 31st Battalion in his honour took place on Thursday, February 11, at the Exhibition grounds, after the battalion returned from a route march in drill order. Following the tea, Sir Johnston complimented Colonel A. H. Bell and his officers on the physique and spirit the men exhibited on parade. Ref. "Actor Visits Troops," *The Calgary Daily Herald*, 12 February 1915, 6. For a description of Forbes-Robertson's visits to Calgary, see Donald B. Smith, *Calgary's Grand Story: The Making of a Prairie Metropolis from the Viewpoint of Two Heritage Buildings* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006), chaps. 1 and 8.



OFFICERS OF THE 31ST BATTALION, CANADIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE AT CALGARY, ALBERTA, FEBRUARY 1915 (GLENBOW ARCHIVES, NA-3620-15).

Back row (left to right): Lieut. W.J. Hall; Lieut. W.B. Forster; Lieut. W. McIntosh; Lieut. W.F. Seaton; Lieut. H.H. Whitehead; Lieut. C. Lambart; Lieut. C.A. Bateman; Lieut. P.B.R. Tucker; Lieut. E.A. Boucher; Lieut. W. Jewitt; Lieut. W.R. Wolley-Dod.

Middle row (left to right): Lieut. E.F. Pinkham; Lieut. P.G. Tofft; Lieut. W. Motherwell; Capt. W.R. Walker; Lieut. F.R. Martin; Capt. C.H. Westmore; Lieut. H.W. McGill; Lieut. J.H. L'Amey; Lieut. C.H. Hartt; Lieut. R. Pouncey; Lieut. V.J.L. Eccles.

Front row (left to right): Capt. J.C. MacPherson; Capt. E.E.E. Bailey; Capt. H.M. Splane; Capt. A.E. Myatt; Major W.H. Hewgill; Lieut. Col. A.H. Bell; Major J.D.R. Stewart; Capt. L.H. Dawson; Capt. E.S. Doughty; Capt. W.W. Piper; Capt. J.C. Page.

Months later I encountered him in the south of England. One June afternoon, after I lay down in my tent and fell asleep, I was awakened by the voices of several in conversation outside and close to the tent wall outside my tent. One of the voices, a deep, rich resonant one, seemed oddly familiar to me. I remarked to Palmer, who was in the tent with me, that if we were anywhere else, I would say that the voice was that of Forbes Robertson. We got up and went out, and sure enough, there was the famous actor in company with his brother who bore him a striking resemblance. Sir Johnstone had been in the vicinity, and hearing that our unit was encamped in the area, had taken the trouble to look us up.

It must be remembered that during our time in Calgary most of us were busily engaged in trying to become familiar with the rules and regulations of mess procedure as well as the more important aspects of military training. As is usual in such cases the non-essentials were rather unduly emphasized. For instance, it was considered a grave breach of decorum for an officer to pass from the ante room wearing his Sam Browne belt⁵ unless he happened to be orderly officer. For my part I was usually able to escape censure for this very grave offence upon the excuse that I was always on duty, which was indeed really the case. However I was fined refreshments for the entire mess on one occasion when I sat down to dinner with one shoulder strap of my serge unbuttoned. It happened to be our old friend Tofft who called attention to this enormity. My reciting of this trivial episode implies that eventually we were able to obtain proper uniforms.

During these early days most of us were utterly ignorant of the meaning of various bugle calls floating about during most of our waking hours. Our buglers were green like the rest of us, and many of the calls blown both on and off parade might well have puzzled a veteran campaigner. I remember one evening when we were all at dinner a most peremptory call sounded which the adjutant informed us was the call for officers at the double. In a wildly excited state we rushed down to the orderly room prepared for almost anything up to the near approach of the enemy only to find that the bugler was under the impression that he was rendering quite a different call.

General war news, of course, claimed a very considerable part of our interest and discussion. I clearly remember two officers returning to the mess one afternoon with the cheering news of Admiral Sturdee's destruction of Von Spee's fleet off the Falkland Islands. Later, one evening, when a number of us were sitting in the ante room of the mess, Lieutenant Jewitt came in with the news of Admiral Beatty's victory over the German battle cruiser squadron and the sinking of the *Blucher*.⁶

5 A leather belt with a strap over the right shoulder, named after General Sir Sam Browne, V.C., the officer who designed it.

6 The *Blucher* was a German armoured cruiser which took part in the Battle of the Dogger Bank, a one-day sortie into the North Sea. On January 24, 1915, the British battle cruiser squadron under the command of Admiral Beatty intercepted Admiral von Hipper's squadron during a third attempt to shell English coastal towns. In a running fight the *Blucher* was engaged and sank, and the British flagship *Lion* suffered severe damage.

Two topics of purely local nature excited our personal interest. First, would our unit be used to form part of the 2nd Canadian Division then being organized, or would it be used as a reinforcing battalion for the 1st Canadian Division then in England? Second, when would we receive orders to leave for overseas? The latter was a subject for speculation over many months. We felt almost hopeless when we read of the departure of the 30th Battalion from Winnipeg early in the winter. The answers to the first question came around the time of the New Year when we received orders definitely allotting us a place in the 6th Brigade of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division. From this time on concentrated interest was given to the question of the probable date of our departure for overseas.

During all this early period of our training the unit was gradually settling down to work and acquiring proficiency and discipline. The latter caused little trouble, for the men were quite prepared for it, understood its necessity, and conformed to the requirements of the situation more readily and with less friction than could have been reasonably expected. As training advanced the strengths and weaknesses of the provisionally appointed non-commissioned officers became more manifest, and from time to time these important ranks were filled or made vacant as circumstances warranted. The commanding officer, and every officer in the battalion, was on constant lookout for suitable material for officers as well as for N.C.O.s. Each capable man was promoted as required and the inefficient eliminated. It was the painful duty of the company officer to give an adverse report upon a non-commissioned officer who showed early promise but who failed to make good.

As the Christmas season approached we made adequate preparations to observe the festival in a fitting manner. I remember we had a regimental Christmas card produced. I must have given all of mine away, for I have not one in my possession now. Of course, most of us had our photographs taken, just as soon as we could get a complete uniform.

I applied for leave during Christmas week, and this was granted with the proviso that my absence would not entail "cost to the public." It was arranged that Major Hewetson should take my place for the week of my absence, and I must say that his pay was never charged to me. I left Calgary for Vancouver on December 23 and rejoined the unit on December 30. I had a pleasant holiday in Vancouver and while on leave wore mufti for the last time until May, 1919. The war atmosphere was evident in Vancouver as in Calgary. Large numbers were in training at the exhibition grounds there, and my brother drove me out to see the place. Had

I then known that the 29th Battalion, with whom we were afterwards brigaded, was in training there I might have made myself acquainted. However I was on a holiday, in civilian attire, and did not frequent military circles to any extent.

My holiday came to an end all too soon, and I reported for duty on December 30. I found all ranks in a state of pleasurable excitement, for the news had just arrived that our battalion would form part of the 6th Infantry Brigade in the 2nd Canadian Division. This may not sound much, but it meant a great deal to every officer and man in the battalion. In short, it meant that we had attained a certain status; that we would retain our identity as a fighting unit and would not be disbanded to furnish reinforcements upon reaching England.⁷

Prior to the announcement of our definite inclusion in the 2nd Division there were almost daily rumours floating around the barracks in reference to the place of our ultimate destination. Almost every theatre of war including the Dardanelles figured at one time or another. Bermuda received honourable mention on many an occasion. Here we were to relieve the Royal Canadian Regiment for active service overseas. Had we gone to Bermuda it would have been a trip home for at least one of our officers, for Lieutenant Park Tucker was a Bermudian.

One other incident might be mentioned concerning this period, and that is the matter of the first issue of boots, or, as we Canadians like to call them, shoes. These fell to pieces in a very short time, and the public as well as the troops concerned manifested considerable indignation. The question of graft arose and a minor scandal developed. Our Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant was required to attend an investigation held in Ottawa. I do not even remember the findings of the investigating committee, but I recall that our Minister of Militia was referred to in the press as General Sir Sham Shoes.⁸

Of course the whole incident was a most unfortunate one and created a painful impression throughout the country. Nevertheless I am

7 Only 50 of the 260 infantry battalions raised in Canada during the war went on to serve in France. The great majority were broken up in England to provide reinforcements for the Corps. A few were converted to other purposes such as railway or labour battalions and at least retained their identity. Soldiers and officers alike were bitterly disappointed when their unit was dissolved. – P B.

8 Hughes was not personally corrupt, but he surrounded himself with Conservative partisans who ensured that contracts went to the favoured. The apparent tolerance of wartime profiteering in Hughes' department greatly undermined the reputation of the Borden government. – P B.

of the opinion that there was never any intentional dishonesty on the part of the contractors.⁹ They were simply undertaking a piece of business with which they were unfamiliar and did not understand. At that time the Canadian manufacturer made shoes with a view to appearance rather than utility or wearing qualities, and this still holds true to a great extent. Ladies shoes are notoriously of the most flimsy construction and materials.

All are made upon lasts, and many dealers possess slight knowledge and apparently little interest in fitting their customers properly. The manufacturer can not be held blameworthy on this account; he must supply the people what they wish to pay for, and they will pay for appearance rather than for wearing qualities.

And this is what happened in respect to the contracts for military footwear. The manufacturer supplied an article that experience had taught him would meet with popular favour, but the result was a howl of disapproval a few weeks after the boots were put to use. It is altogether likely that had the choice been left to the soldier as between the Canadian made shoe and the English ammunition boot that he afterwards wore, he would still have picked out the former, for he was looking for something dressy and swanky rather than for a boot that would be the thing for marching over cobble-stoned roads. At any rate, it was shocking the way the first issue of boots fell to pieces. The men obtained a fairly satisfactory article later on, and the whole episode seemed to be forgotten long before the end of the war. Perhaps the controversy over the Ross rifle may have obliterated the memory of the defective boots.

After the New Year the 50th Battalion Infantry and the 12th Mounted Rifles were recruited to full strength and the number of troops in barracks rose to a very respectable figure. I can recall that the 12th Mounted had a question of their own that gave rise to many an animated discussion, and it was the one of when the unit would be supplied with horses. With the members of the gallant 12th, horses formed the subject of the most speculative interest during their waking hours. And indeed, the wearing of brightly burnished spurs month after month by the personnel of a mounted unit, and not a horse in sight, was apt to stir one's sense of the ludicrous.

I have spoken on the subject of discipline, and of the ready and cheerful way in which ranks accepted the restrictions and prohibitions

9 Sadly, McGill's generous assessment was far from true in many cases. – P B.

incidental to the military life. Of course there were exceptions, and minor breaches of discipline, both in the way of omission and commission, that occurred from time to time. There was occasionally a case of more serious nature such as desertion. Our guard room was just inside the 4th Street entrance of the Exhibition Grounds, and naturally the detention cells were occupied at times. Most of the orderly room cases were for the crime – every misdemeanour is labelled a crime in the army – of drunkenness, or for the less serious offence of returning late to the barracks.

For a time men coming in late at night and apprehended for being drunk were inclined to cause me considerable annoyance. The mere fact of his being arrested often had a sobering effect on the offender who at once began to cast about for ways and means to extricate himself from his difficulty. What more reasonable course could suggest itself than an appeal to the medical officer for a professional opinion upon the question of the alleged intoxication? It became quite the regular thing for the prisoner to ask the orderly officer of the day to have him paraded before the M.O. for an inspection. On more than one occasion I was routed out of the mess at a late hour by the orderly officer whom I trailed down to the guard room for the purpose of inspecting an alleged drunk.

I remember one late night occasion when Lieutenant Bailey asked me to see a soldier that had been put into the guard room on the charge of drunkenness. The guard room was in the west end of what was before, and now is again, the poultry building. The room was divided into three compartments, a centre, into which the outside door opened, and one at each end, railed off from the main room by stout palings reaching nearly to the ceiling. The centre room was for general purposes and for the use of members of the guard. The two end enclosures were for the accommodation of the prisoners.

As I entered the centre room with the orderly officer and met the sergeant of the guard I saw through the bars that there was a prisoner confined in each of the detention rooms. The prisoner who had demanded an examination was in the room to our right as we went in. The sergeant unlocked the door and brought him out for my inspection which I carried out in what I fondly supposed was an approved scientific manner. Finally I expressed my opinion, very foolishly in the presence of the accused, that whatever may have been his condition at the time of the arrest he was not drunk at the moment.

During all this performance we had, unobserved by us, an intensely interested spectator and listener in the person of the prisoner in the

other end room. He had climbed up the palings, for all the world like a monkey, and now was clinging high up with his face showing between the upper ends of the vertical bars and the ceiling. We were suddenly startled by his comment upon the proceedings, and looking up saw him in the position described.

“Yes,” he said in a quiet voice, “but what the hell about me?”

My evidence was not called in the case, and to this day I do not know how the Colonel disposed of the charges against the two offenders.

I was soon relieved of this disagreeable duty, or rather imposition, as I learned it really was. I happened to mention the matter incidentally to Lieut.-Col. Bell to whom I had probably told the story set out above. In any case it was not in the way of a complaint for I had no other idea than that it was my duty to go and see these fellows when called by the orderly officer. The Commanding Officer soon set me right.

“Do not be imposed upon,” he said, “these men put under arrest have no right or justification to demand an inspection by the medical officer unless they are parading sick. If I were you I shouldn’t answer any more such calls. In any case,” he continued, “your evidence is of no more weight than that of the sergeant of the guard.”

This information was of value to me, for it enabled me to decline posing as an expert witness in cases of discipline involving the question of drunkenness. I often thought since how well it would be if civil courts adopted the common sense practice of the army in this matter and ceased to allow so much hair splitting over the determination of the question.

By the middle of January training had advanced to a point where a military display seemed justified. A committee was formed and steps taken to stage an assault-at-arms exhibition. This took place in the horse show building on the evening of January 16. The affair was a success in every way and the public attended in large numbers. Captain P. J. Daly, the officer commanding D Company, distinguished himself at the tent pegging.

On January 19, 1915, the battalion was inspected by Major-General¹⁰ the Honourable Sir Sam Hughes, Minister of Militia. This function was anticipated with considerable trepidation on the part of the senior officers. This was not through any lack of confidence in themselves or their

10 While Hughes held General rank in the militia, he was effectively a civilian as Minister of Militia and Defence in the Borden government. — P B.

men. Had a superior general officer been about to inspect they would have had few misgivings, as the unit was capable of acquitting itself in a proper manner. However no one knew how the Minister would react even to a creditable performance. We all knew by report his impulsive and unreasoning temperament, and his insane self-sufficiency which at times would seem to reach the stage of an actual disease. From the beginning of the war he had seemed determined to usurp the position of Commander-in-Chief of the forces, and to neglect those of his proper office as Minister of the Crown. We also knew of his bitter prejudice against officers of the permanent force, and our battalion was fortunate to be under the command of a professional soldier. However in the eyes of the Minister of Militia this circumstance was as likely as not to turn out to our disadvantage.

The day of inspection was cold and stormy, one of the worst we had all winter. The battalion turned out in fine shape and made a most impressive appearance on parade. The unit performed the evolutions and movements incidental to the inspection in an almost faultless manner, and passed through the ordeal without a hitch. Sir Sam Hughes was in an amiable mood and expressed his satisfaction in respect to the appearance and performance of the battalion. He made us feel that he was really well disposed towards us and his attitude was most friendly. The Minister was a likeable man under favourable circumstances and his affability evidently sincere. Estimates of his character and ability differ widely among those in the best positions to judge. I have often thought that had he allowed his actions to be governed by reason and judgment, rather than by emotion and prejudice, his record would have been much less open to criticism.

After the inspection General Hughes came over to where the supernumerary officers¹¹ were standing on parade. There were four of us: the Machine Gun Officer, Lieutenant Fred Martin; the Paymaster, Captain Ross Palmer; the Padre, Captain Robert Walker; and myself. His conversation was cordial and made us wish that all his public utterances and actions might be in keeping with the good sense and taste he displayed on this occasion. There was a civic reception and dinner at the Palliser Hotel that evening, and the majority of the 31st Battalion officers, myself included, attended. This was the one and only time, except on parade, on which I went to hear the Honourable Sir Sam Hughes.

11 Additional officers attached to the battalion for special purposes.



MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONOURABLE SIR SAM HUGHES, MINISTER OF MILITIA, INSPECTS THE BATTALION.

Later, in England and in the war zone, I carefully avoided, whenever possible, the humiliation of listening to his bombastic and indiscreet effusions, despite the good impression his quite moderate statements made on this occasion.

Meanwhile battalion training had proceeded to the point where further drilling was merely the repetition of work already done. The question of our departure for England where we could undertake more advanced instruction with brigades and divisions, and the probable date of departure, became a more lively source of speculation than ever. It seemed to us that our leaving could not be delayed much longer, now that the period of battalion drill was likely to prove unprofitable if unduly prolonged.

Training in tactical exercises, including night operations, was undertaken, and we all felt that we were moving forward yet another step in preparation for active service. As the sun became higher and warmer, and we began to be sensible of a feeling of spring in the air, the restlessness and anxiety to be moving became more manifest. We all lived in constant expectation of the receipt of orders to leave for England. On

February 17 the city of Calgary presented us with a civic farewell. We all felt that now, surely, after we had received the official civic farewell, the date of our actual departure could not be far away.

On February 23, our general of division, Major-General S. B. Steele, later Sir Sam Steele, inspected the unit. It was a fine, warm sunny day and the inspection went off in a very satisfactory manner. The divisional commander addressed us from the old grand stand after the inspection, but to the disappointment and sorrow of all, was unable to tell us the date of our leaving. We had confidently expected him to make a definite pronouncement.

February passed into March with increasing signs of an early spring. This month brought us the news of the battle of Neuve Chapelle and other events in the theatre of war indicating a renewal of active hostilities which had been somewhat curtailed by the winter. These news items increased our impatience to be off, for we all wanted to reach the war zone before the fighting came to an end. Had we been able to peer ever so darkly into the future we probably would have been able to restrain our eagerness.

About this time inspections seemed to be the order of the day. One fine afternoon Mr. R. B. Bennett,¹² then member of the House of Commons for Calgary, and later Prime Minister of Canada, honoured us by an informal visit of inspection. By this time the battalion had been furnished horses and made quite a brave show on parade as all of the mounted officers turned out on horseback. At this inspection I was called upon, for the first time, to put my stretcher bearer section through their drill and work. Lieut.-Col. Bell seemed quite pleased with the way they acquitted themselves.

Shortly after this we received orders for an inspection on April 1 by our Brigade Commander, Colonel H. B. Ketchen, who was making a tour of inspection of the four units under his command; the 27th of Winnipeg, the 28th of Regina, the 29th of Vancouver, and ourselves. Now, we thought we shall certainly learn exactly the date of our leaving Calgary, for it seemed reasonable to suppose that the date of our leaving

12 Calgary lawyer Richard Bedford Bennett was the Conservative MP for the riding of Calgary East from 1911 to 1917. Following an eight-year hiatus, he returned to Ottawa as the MP representing the riding of Calgary West in 1925. He served as Prime Minister of Canada from August 7, 1930, to October 23, 1935. Ref. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, s.v. "Bennett, Richard Bedford, Viscount" (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1988).

for overseas must be decided before the inspection would take place. April 1 turned out a beautiful warm Spring day. The inspection could be considered a success, but in so far as any definite news of our leaving Canada was concerned, the date was April fool's day for us. The Brigade Commander had no definite news. In his talk after the show he advised us to pluck up courage as the long period of waiting must be nearly at an end. So we were compelled perforce to remain in darkness in respect to the dominant question of the mess and barrack room.

I do not recall that the establishment of transport animals was complete, but the riding horses were now on the strength of the battalion. The sale had been advertised, and on the appointed day the ranchers within reasonable distance brought in their animals. Colonel A. D. McRae of Vancouver attended and conducted the purchases. We all had a chance to choose our own horses provided the price was within the figure allowed by the purchasing agent. Major Hewgill helped me to pick mine.

The animal he chose was one that would not have impressed me favourably had I been left to my own resources and very limited knowledge of horses. This unfortunate beast had apparently come through the winter gathering his own living at a straw stack. He was as poor as a crow and covered with a shaggy coat which resembled that of a musk-ox. Nevertheless the keen appraising eye of Major Hewgill had recognized the good breeding and stock beneath this unprepossessing exterior. I did express some doubt as to the wisdom of our choice but the Major reassured me.

"Wait," he said, "until that fellow has had a month of grooming and feeding on oats and none of us will be able to recognize him."

Events proved the truth of the Major's words and his sound judgment in the matter of horse flesh. Within less than the period specified I had good reason to be proud of my mount. He must have had considerable thoroughbred in him, for after he got fed up a bit he was as proud as Lucifer. Lamb, my groom, a man from Medicine Hat, understood his work and took a real interest in his charge. In less than a month one would never recognize the dejected looking animal that had come in from the range the day of the sale.

He was not a big horse, a little over fifteen hands in height, but clean limbed and excellently put together. In colour he was a deep rich brown with a white spot on the forehead and three white feet. He was a true country bred beast and had evidently never been in a city before. When I first began to ride him out he was terrified of the city sights and sounds.

Autos and streetcars were appalling sights to him. However, he was never mean or ugly, and would let me ride him up close to a car all of a tremble all the while. After I let him touch his nose to a street car or auto once or twice he lost his fear entirely and treated these strange contraptions with complete indifference thereafter.

When I began to ride him downtown he would catch the sight of his reflection in the plate glass windows of the shops, and would at once assume the grand air, head up and stepping out like a real war horse. He was always keen to go and I never had to use a spur on him although at times I may have done so inadvertently. I do not even remember his name now, but I became strongly attached to the gallant little fellow, and it has always been a source of regret to me that he was not allowed to accompany me to the war zone. As an explanation I may say that just before we left Calgary the horses were given the glanders¹³ test by the veterinary officers and some of them reacted positively. As a consequence all of the animals were left in quarantine when we entrained and we never saw them again. During the years following I had many different remounts assigned me, but I never cared for any of them particularly and my first love remained my true and only.

The final month of our stay in Calgary passed quickly and pleasantly. The ground was dry and free from snow. In the fine warm weather the battalion was doing tactical training, much more interesting than the everlasting parade ground drill. Besides, those of us who had our horses were able to enjoy splendid rides out into the surrounding countryside.

13 A contagious disease in horses marked by swelling of glands beneath the jaw and discharge of mucous from the nostrils.

V THE MOVE TO ENGLAND

Then, forth, dear countrymen: let us deliver
Our puissance into the hand of God,
Putting it straight in expedition.
Cheerly to sea; the signs of war advance:

– Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Act II, Scene II

Finally on May 10 the news we had so long expected and eagerly awaited suddenly arrived, and we were ordered to prepare for entraining on the following night. The notice was short, but none of us found fault with it on that account. All was bustle and excitement. We were given to understand that we were to travel by Canadian Northern Railway, but outside of that received very little information. I have often wondered since what could have been the purpose of all the secrecy and mystery that was thrown about the matter of our leaving Calgary. It was something that in the very nature of it could not be kept secret; so why all the heavy atmosphere of intense mystery? When our first train went through Winnipeg I found that the people on the street knew much more of our intended movements and destination than we did ourselves.

I neglected to mention that two stirring pieces of news had come to Canada during the last month of our stay in Calgary; the report of the German gas attack at Ypres with the story of the wonderful stand and heavy losses of the 1st Canadian Division at St. Julien on April 22;¹ and, later, the report of the sinking of the *Lusitania*.² Many of those who were casualties in the Second Battle of Ypres were well known to most of our officers. Although we were just as anxious as ever to be on our

1 The 1st Canadian Division suffered 6,000 casualties in three days of heavy fighting, April 22–24, in the process surviving two poison gas attacks. This marked this weapon's initial use on the Western Front. The Second Battle of Ypres was the C.E.F.'s first major engagement of the war. – P B.

2 The British passenger ship *Lusitania* was torpedoed off Kinsale, Ireland, by German submarine U 20 on May 7, 1915, with the loss of 1,198 lives.

way to the front we began to realize clearly that there would be plenty for us to do after we reached the scene of action.

The evening of May 11 arrived and our preparations for departure were practically complete. We were to go in two trains over the Canadian Northern Railway, but other than knowing this we remained in complete ignorance of the exact time of entrainment and all other details. Our blankets, baggage and all other personal belongings other than the marching kit had been packed, and we prepared to wait patiently for the order to fall in for the march to the station. It was a fine clear evening and hundreds of people came down to the grounds to say farewell to friends in the battalion which was standing to, ready to move off. Nobody could go to bed, for, as I have said, the blankets were all packed and probably in the baggage cars of our train by that time. Darkness settled down but there was still no sign of moving.

Presently the officers were given permission to go out of the barracks grounds provided we were back by midnight. Several of us went uptown and wandered about for a time, meeting friends and acquaintances. Of course our contemplated departure under the cover of night seemed to us of the 31st Battalion a matter of tremendous importance, and we were thrilled and excited in proportion to the bulk of the affair in our view. However, most of those whom we met were not wildly excited over the event, and I, for one, felt somewhat let down by the cool manner and indifference in which this, to me, high water mark in contemporary history, could be treated by friends I met in one or two clubs I visited for the last time in many a year.

I returned to our dismantled mess quarters well before midnight and found a jovial farewell celebration in progress. Many of the officers from other units, and others unattached, had gathered to wish us God speed. This party lasted until the early hours of the morning. It did not interfere with our rest, for we had no beds upon which to lie. Around daybreak I went into the little cubbyhole that had served me for a bedroom for so many months, and, lying down on the bare boards in my clothes, had an hour or two of troubled slumber. Later, on active service I had many a sleep under even less favourable circumstances.

Morning came and we had breakfast, our last meal at the old mess. Shortly after this the order was given for the left half of the battalion, C and D Companies, to fall in for the march to the station. I had been allotted to the second train, but at the last moment received orders to go on the first.

The 12th Mounted Rifles had cancelled all parades and were out in force to cheer us on our way, lining the streets through which we passed on our way to the station. Many men and officers of the 50th Battalion were also present although they had skipped parade in order to show us the courtesy of taking part in the farewell demonstration. The ardent military zeal of their commanding officer would not allow him to interrupt the training of his unit for half a day.

There was a large crowd at the station, the old temporary structure of the C.N.R. in Calgary. Colonel Cruickshank, the District Officer Commanding, had come to the station early in the morning and waited until the train pulled out. When bidding us good bye he showed considerable emotion, surprising in one usually so perfectly self-controlled. As we filed past to shake his hand and receive his wishes for the best of luck he begged us to forego the ceremony of giving the salute for this one time.

There seemed to be an interminable wait before the train began to move, and the delay was really painful for both those about to leave and for those waiting to bid farewell to friends, in many instances for the last time in this world. Finally, at 10:30 a.m. all were on board and the train moved slowly out of the station in the commencement of the long rail journey for Quebec, our port of embarkation. The second train left shortly afterwards, but of the exact time I have no knowledge, for I was already on my way. For several miles out of the city automobiles raced along the road beside the railroad, the occupants frantically waving last farewells.

Before the evening of May 12 the 31st Battalion was miles away from Calgary, rolling on its way in the first stage of its long journey to the battlefields of Europe. The unit had been stationed in Calgary for five months, lacking a few days; and we left many friends and well-wishers behind us. However one connecting link remained in the old quarters: the first reinforcement draft of one hundred men under the command of Lieutenant Eccles.

Of our journey to Quebec there is little worth recording, and I have no vivid recollection of the succession of minor events incidental to a long trip on a troop train. As have I mentioned there were two companies aboard, C and D. The train was under the command of Major Stewart, the junior major of the unit. Seaton, the assistant adjutant, was with us, and of course the company officers of C and D, commanded respectively by Captains Doughty and Daly. A dining car was attached for the use of the officers and sergeants. Complete arrangements had been made for

the feeding of the men, and outside of the slowness of service everything in this respect was quite satisfactory. The only complaint the men had was that they sometimes had a long wait for their turns at the dining tables.

The journey the first day was more or less a triumphal procession. At nearly every town we passed, crowds were out to cheer us on our way, a comment in itself upon the atmosphere of secrecy that had been thrown about the details of our departure. At Hanna, I remember, Dr. Wade was among those out to welcome us. But it was at Youngstown that the greatest enthusiasm was shown. The town band was out to meet the train, and apparently the majority of the inhabitants had foregathered. This town, you may recall, was one of our recruiting points, and many of the citizens were enrolled in our ranks. Practically all these were in A Company which was on the train following. Hence our arrival must have been somewhat of a disappointment to the good people of Youngstown; but one could never have guessed this from their demeanour. However, Sproston, who had left the town five months before as a private, was on our train as the officer in charge of transport and did the honours as liaison officer.

The following day we had a long somewhat dreary trip through the province of Saskatchewan, made more tiresome by a constant downpour of rain. Nevertheless the latter was most welcome to us, for we reflected that it might help to feed us in the trenches the next winter. And indeed, so it was, for this was the beginning of the copious rains that produced the finest crop of wheat that Western Canada had ever known.

That day we instituted our regular routine. In the afternoons we played poker in the smoking compartment, and at night we would have a game of bridge in the drawing-room, Major Stewart's quarters. I do not think that we made any variation in this arrangement until we reached Quebec. We reached Dauphin, Manitoba, at sundown of this second day and the train was halted long enough to allow the men to detrain and take a little physical training. I remember overhearing one bystander remark that the battalion was fortunate in having at least one officer wearing a monocle. He was referring to Captain Blair of D Company who was the only officer of the unit with the temerity to wear one.

Our run from Dauphin to Winnipeg was the fastest we made during the trip and we reached the latter city around midnight. Here I learned from my sister, who met me at the train, that the 27th Battalion had left that morning and we were all to sail on the *Carpathia*. Another

commentary on our secrecy of our movement. After we left Winnipeg we all went to bed and awakened the next morning in the wilderness of rocks, trees and lakes of New Ontario. I believe we ran over the National Transcontinental lines during the day, switching down from Graham, or some other point in Northern Ontario, to reach the C.P.R. tracks at Fort William where we arrived at sundown, May 14. A large crowd was at the station when we pulled in, and a bevy of girls went along the train gathering the names of boys so that they might write to them, all of which was very complimentary and gratifying to the troops. In no single instance at any of these stops did I see anything objectionable in the conduct of a single one of our men, nor did I ever hear an offensive expression used in conversation with those gathered at the various stations. Major Stewart remarked to me that nothing on the long trip gave him more pleasure and satisfaction than this gentlemanly behaviour on the part of all on board.

We ran along the North Shore of Lake Superior during this our third night on the train, and arrived at Sudbury the following evening. Here there was no enthusiastic greeting, and the men at once sensed the cold and hostile attitude of the crowd gathered on the station platform. A blackguard looking crew they were. Who they were or where they came from I do not know, but none of us liked the look of them. They made no hostile sound or gesture – they probably knew that it would be dangerous for them to do so – but they stood silently looking on with scowls and expressions of intense hatred on their faces. I have an idea that most of these fellows would be interned before the war was far advanced. I for one was relieved when the train left the station. The atmosphere was tense, and it required only a single overt act or gesture on the part of this villainous looking mob to have started a riot. Our chaps would have poured out of the train and beaten them into a jelly.

The following day we passed through the old settled part of Ontario, past well kept farms and through various towns. We went through Ottawa about three o'clock in the afternoon. One of the boys had a pet dog that was left behind when the train left the station. He ran after the train for what must have been the greater part of a mile, and we could see him still running hard down the track just before he was lost to view in the distance. We passed through Montreal just before sundown, and as darkness fell we were well on our way in the final stage of our journey to Quebec and tidewater. None of us went to bed until the train stopped beside the docks in the city of Quebec at 3 a.m., May 17. Some of our crowd, I think Doughty and Tucker, could not wait for morning to see

the town and went up to the Château Frontenac. Personally I thought that there was another day coming and that the balance of the night might be well spent in getting a little sleep. "And so to bed."

The next morning I was awakened by Lieutenant Boucher thrusting his head between the curtains of my berth, and knew from this that our other train had arrived. I lost no time in getting up and dressed to greet the other half of the battalion. The first thing that struck me was that all those officers that had been clean shaven when we parted in Calgary five days before were now displaying embryo mustaches. I learned later that our Brigadier, in order to increase the efficiency of those under his command, had decreed and issued an order that none of his officers might shave his upper lip. Thus is war carried on.

When we tumbled out of the train we found that it stood on a siding almost at the water's edge, and lying alongside the wharf a few yards away was the *Carpathia* with steam up and wisps of smoke issuing from her funnel.³ This was a cheerful sight, especially along with the appearance of the brigade staff, the other half of our own unit, and the 27th Battalion of Winnipeg. Up to that moment we had been possessed by a haunting fear that we might be switched down to Valcartier, there to wait, perhaps for weeks, for transport to carry us overseas.

After breakfast embarkation began and was completed by 11 a.m. I went on board early and saw that my medical stores and supplies were shipped safely. I then hunted up the ship's doctor who piloted me about the vessel, showing me among other features the ship's dispensary. He gave me the pleasing information that I might use this room for my sick parades during the voyage. However, we would continue to use our own medical supplies.

Brig.-Gen. Ketchen, the brigade commander, told me that he was about to send up town for a few last minute requirements, and suggested that if I were in need of any medical supplies now was the time to put in my requisition. His idea, a perfectly sound one, was that we should leave all of our regulation stores and equipment intact until we took the field. We already carried a supernumerary chest for current needs, and I gave him a small list of supplies to replenish this and to replace those used in the train journey.

At 3 p.m. the *Carpathia* cast off and began to warp out into the stream. Just as we cast off I had to go below for some reason. By the time I was

3 The twelve-year-old Cunard steamship was never converted into a troopship although provision had been made to accommodate up to three thousand officers and men.



TROOPS ON THE S.S. *CARPATHIA* (GLENBOW ARCHIVES, NA-3868-24).

able to come on deck again, the ship had swung her nose down stream and had passed Point Lévis. We were on our way to England.

The vessel on which we had embarked had only one claim to distinction: she was the ship that had rescued the survivors of the *Titanic* disaster a few years before.⁴ There was a brass plate commemorating this exploit at the foot of the companion way leading to the dining salon. At the time of our sailing she was under the command of Captain E. G. Diggle, R.D.,⁵ R.N.R. She had recently been in the Mediterranean trade, and looked it. The quarters for the officers were tolerable, but those of the men were vile, crowded and filthy. I do not think that I have ever seen so many cockroaches in one place anywhere before or since. The vessel was grossly overcrowded to begin with, and the sanitary accommodation inadequate for so many men. Her maximum speed was around thirteen knots.

4 1,513 crew and passengers lost their lives on April 15, 1912, when the ship struck an Atlantic iceberg on her maiden voyage and sank.

5 The Royal Naval Reserve Decoration (R.D.) was originally conferred on those officers whose service in the R.N.R. totalled at least fifteen years.

We had on board the 6th Infantry Brigade Headquarters, the 27th Winnipeg Battalion, the 31st Alberta Battalion, the Borden Armoured Machine Gun Battery, a flying officer and a few other details, including Belgian reservists. There were in all 82 officers, 133 N.C.O.s, and 1996 other ranks, 2,211 all told, besides the members of the ship's officers and crew. The following is a list of the officers on board, taken from one of the original passenger lists still in my possession.

H.M. Transport
 "Carpathia"
 (Captain E. G. Diggle, R.D., R.N.R.)

CHIEF ENGINEER

J. Rowley

SURGEON

S. P. Hodgkinson

CHIEF STEWARD

Thomas Dickinson

CHIEF OFFICER

D. Thomas, R.N.R.

PURSER

P. D. Loch

ASSISTANT PURSER

J. M. Johnston

Sailed from Quebec, May 17, 1915.

List of Officers of the 27th City of Winnipeg, 31st Battalion and Borden's Armoured Battery, C.E.F.

6th INFANTRY BRIGADE

Col. H. D. B. Ketchen, Brigade Commander and O.C. Troops on Board.

Major P. A. Moore, Brigade Major

Captain P. J. Montague, Staff Captain

Lieut. W. H. Gilroy, Dental Surgeon

Lieut. A. A. Garfat, Dental Surgeon

27th CITY OF WINNIPEG BATTALION

Lt. Col. I. R. Snider, O.C.

Major D. S. McKay
 Major E. J. Rogers
 Major R. Tidmus
 Major E. W. Mermagen
 Major S. M. McLeod
 Major A. Kitson
 Capt. F. M. Steel, Adjutant
 Capt. A. F. O. Meredith
 Capt. A. A. Keyman
 Capt. C. A. Barrager, M.O.
 Capt. A. J. Mathews
 Capt. G. C. Easton
 Capt. R. A. Taunton
 Lieut. W. E. Schweitzer
 Lieut. E. Cay
 Lieut. T. W. Willis

Lieut. H. A. Webb
 Lieut. A. A. Young
 Lieut. H. C. McMordie
 Lieut. R. E. N. Jones
 Lieut. H. A. Prall-Pierce
 Lieut. G. S. Laing
 Lieut. H. S. Edwards
 Lieut. E. C. Complin
 Lieut. W. M. McCaw
 Lieut. E. C. Duffin
 Lieut. H. J. Riley
 Lieut. M. H. Garton
 Lieut. T. M. Webster
 Lieut. G. H. Wilson
 Lieut. H. R. Page
 Lieut. W. J. Gordon

31ST BATTALION

Lieut. Col. A. H. Bell, O.C.
 Major W. H. Hewgill
 Major J. D. R. Stewart

Capt. L. H. Dawson

Capt. E. S. Doughty
 Capt. W. T. Tait, Y.M.C.A.
 Capt. A. E. Myatt
 Capt. W. W. Piper
 Capt. H. M. Splane
 Capt. P. J. Daly, D.S.O.
 Capt. A. Blair
 Capt. E. E. E. Bailey
 Capt. J. C. MacPherson
 Capt. C. H. Westmore
 Capt. J. C. Page
 Capt. C. R. Palmer
 Capt. W. R. Walker, Chaplain
 Capt. H. W. McGill, M.O.
 Lieut. J. H. L'Amy
 Lieut. P. G. Tofft
 Lieut. P. B. R. Tucker
 Lieut. W. Jewitt
 Lieut. E. A. Boucher
 Lieut. C. H. Hartt
 Lieut. H. H. Whitehead
 Lieut. C. Lambart
 Lieut. F. R. Martin
 Lieut. C. A. Bateman
 Lieut. W. F. Seaton
 Lieut. W. Motherwell
 Lieut. E. F. Pinkham
 Lieut. W. B. Forster
 Lieut. W. J. Hall
 Lieut. R. Pouncey
 Lieut. W. R. Wolley-Dod
 Lieut. H. Sproston

BORDEN'S ARMOURED BATTERY

Major E. J. Holland, V.C., O.C.B.A.B.
 Lieut. E. H. Holland
 Lieut. W. F. Battersby
 Capt. P. A. G. MacCarthy

Lieut. J. H. Rattery
 Lieut. J. R. Ryan

Captain Shipman (100th Winnipeg Regiment)

AVIATOR SCOTT
 Officers 82
 N.C.O.s 133
 Other Ranks 1,996

Total 2,211

The majority of us remained on deck during the afternoon and watched the farms and villages along the banks of the St. Lawrence as we sailed down the river. In the evening we gathered in the dining salon for mess and were entertained by the band of the 27th Battalion. I recall one of the airs played, "The Tulip and Rose," was then a popular catch, and one that we afterwards heard many times during our period of training in England. I was seated at a table between Captain Tait, the Y.M.C.A. officer, and Major D. S. McKay of Winnipeg, who occupied the end of the table opposite that of the captain of the ship.

Sick parade for the 31st Battalion was ordered for 6:30 each morning and was held, as previously indicated, in the dispensary. The parade always took a fair amount of time, with the result that my two orderlies, Bright and Willis, were nearly always late for breakfast which was billed for the same hour. I made application to the chief steward to supply these two rations each morning.

After a few days this official complained to me of the unwarranted expense to the Cunard Company involved in the giving of two first class meals a day to the orderlies. He used the term "first class food." Well, it may have been, but one could scarcely have suspected it to be such. If the food furnished the officers' table was certainly nothing to rave about, that given to the men would make you sick to look at and would have caused a riot in a British Columbia logging camp or in a C.P.R. extra gang. The men, not being Southern European immigrants, simply loathed it, and many of them welcomed sea-sickness as a relief from constant hunger. Some of them looked ill and weak when we reached Plymouth after eleven days at sea, and they had not been sea-sick either. It is strange that the men had been so ill fed at this date, for four years

later when I returned on a transport the food was infinitely better, and this after and during an acute food shortage.

During the second day out of port we were still running down the river, although the stream was widening out and the shores looked much farther away. In the afternoon we sat on deck and watched the quaint little villages, each with its church steeple, that occupied the rocky coves along the north shore of the Gaspé Peninsula.

I do not know the exact day and hour of our leaving the river, but at any rate the time was rather indefinite. The shores gradually receded, that on the north being the last in view, and presently we were out in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. At least we supposed so, for we were not given any information on this particular point. The senior officers of the brigade may have known our position from day to day, but certainly the junior regimental officers were not taken into the confidence of the admiralty in this respect. We must have steered the south course, for had we taken the north route the Labrador coast would have remained in sight longer than it did. We tried to estimate the amount of southing we were making by the height of the sun at noon.

My professional duties on board were not very onerous, except that the sick parade was set for an early hour and came half an hour earlier each morning as the time changed. It was necessary for us to advance our watches thirty minutes each day. Usually I went with Lieut.-Col. Bell on his rounds through the ship each morning inspecting the men's quarters. We had a few sick, but not many. The 31st Battalion had been assigned the forward starboard hospital, and we usually had a few patients occupying bunks there. On May 20 Private Harris of B Company was isolated in the after starboard hospital as a scarlet fever suspect. Harris bore his confinement with patience and philosophy, especially after I prevailed upon the brigade commander to authorize the issue of a bottle of beer a day for him. We had very little sea-sickness among those on board, except for one day when quite a brisk wind blew up and a little more than a moderate sea was running. For the greater part of our journey the weather was fine and the ocean fairly smooth.

I spent most of my afternoons and evenings on deck, enjoying my first long sea voyage. After dark I used to enjoy a turn out on the forward deck, especially when the weather was a bit thick and an occasional whiff of spray would come over the bows. In the afternoons we would sit on deck and watch the seas, getting the occasional glimpse of some of the conventional sights of an ocean voyage, the odd iceberg or whale

and the schools of dolphins racing alongside the ship. Now and then we caught sight of a ship or a smudge of smoke on the horizon. One morning at sick parade I looked through the port hole and saw a full rigged sailing vessel, hull down, on our starboard beam.

The ship's officers were on the whole non-communicative but the third mate was rather an exception to the rule. One evening, when he was on deck off watch he and I fell into talk and discussed the submarine menace. He confided to me that he possessed an ardent wish to run down an enemy U boat, and expressed his intention of making the attempt if one appeared within practicable distance when he happened to be in charge on the bridge. He had grave doubts though that the old tub was capable of the necessary speed to enable him to effect his purpose. The only thing this officer knew of Calgary, our home town, was that Luther McCarty,⁶ the prize fighter, had been killed there in a pugilistic contest a year or two previously.

Every day we were summoned for life boat drill, and every one had a place assigned to him in one of the boats. Fortunately we had no opportunity to put the effects of this drill into action. I think, though, that had we been torpedoed we might have rendered a good account of ourselves, for the units on board were in a high state of discipline. On the other hand we were on a troopship, and it would have been the privilege of a submarine attacking the vessel to sink every man jack of us. We should have had no right to look for mercy, and our only hope lay in the chance of some of our own warships coming to our rescue. As it was we had machine guns mounted on deck, but these would probably have been of little assistance.

The only untoward incident of the voyage occurred on May 23. Private W. Sims of B Company had been acting strangely and appeared obsessed by the fear of enemy submarines. He was put under guard as a precaution. About 4 a.m. he asked his guard to take him on deck for a breath of fresh air. The guard did so, and while he was fumbling in his pocket for a cigarette that his charge had requested the latter took

6 Luther McCarty was the first boxer killed in the ring in Canada. He died at the Tommy Burns Arena on Saturday, May 24, 1913, less than two minutes into a ten-round bout with Arthur Pelkey. The winner of the match was touted to become the white challenger to the reigning heavy-weight champion of the world, an American negro, Jack Johnson. On Sunday night, after the news of the tragic death of the prize fighter had spread, an angry local mob set fire to the arena, which burned to the ground. Arthur Pelkey was charged with manslaughter but was subsequently acquitted.

a flying leap over the rail. The alarm was given and the ship brought about, but no sight of the unfortunate was ever seen again.⁷

When the ship came to a stop in mid-Atlantic, most of us awakened and tumbled out on deck, naturally thinking that something serious must have happened. In the cold gray light of the early morning the ship was standing to and we could see close by a flare burning on the water. A boat was swung over the side and manned, but as no sign of the man overboard could be picked up, the boat was not launched and shortly afterwards we were on our way again. I remember that at the court of inquiry that followed **one of the witnesses gave evidence that Sims' messmates had begun to suspect him of insanity when they observed him reading his Bible.** This was the first death we had had in the battalion since mobilization and the effect was naturally depressing.

During the voyage an order of interest to our battalion was issued by the 6th Brigade advancing our four company commanders to the rank of major. The officers thus promoted were Captains Splane, Dawson, Doughty and Daly. Of course we observed the convention of the sea and held the usual ship's concert one evening towards the end of the voyage. A number of our officers contributed to the program. May 24 was declared a holiday and all parades cancelled.

Generally we were of the opinion that our course was well south of the regular sea lane for vessels, on account of warmer weather and the height of the sun at noon. In Canada, as I have said, we had entertained ourselves by discussing the probable date of our departure for Overseas. Now the subject of our speculations was the port of landing and the probable date of arrival. We even had a pool on the port of destination. I forget the amount and the name of the winner, but it created considerable interest in the smoking room.

Other items of intense interest were the questions of the submarine danger and the probable nature and strength of our escort when we reached the danger zone. Sproston, the transport officer, was particularly full on the subject of submarines. Like the fat boy in *Pickwick* he enjoyed telling us things to make our flesh creep. He dispensed a

7 H. C. Singer and A. A. Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.: From its organization November, 1914 to its demobilization June, 1919* (Calgary: 31st Battalion Association, 1938), 18, states: "Pte. Sims, of B Company, fell overboard and was drowned, in spite of efforts to save him." Edward H. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour* (Winnipeg: Bunker to Bunker Books, 1996), 688, recorded that Pte. William Sims died of disease at sea, May 23, 1915. Sims enlisted in Edmonton at age 24. He was Welsh and a miner.

fresh rumour every day and thoroughly believed his hair-raising stories himself. I can recall one thick night when he went the rounds of the staterooms with the disturbing intelligence that we were being chased at that very moment. None of us ever discovered the source of Sproston's amazing and alarming rumours.

Every day now we kept our eyes open for the first sight of our escort, believing that we must be getting close to the English coast. When I came on deck at 7 a.m., May 28 the sea was fairly rough from a fresh breeze blowing. Quite a number of vessels of all sizes were in view, and we concluded rightly that we must be well into the English Channel. However, no torpedo boat destroyers were there to escort and protect us, and, indeed, none ever appeared. At 9:30 a.m. we sighted land to the north. Later we passed the Eddystone lighthouse and could see the red soil of Devon. At 1 p.m. we dropped anchor in Plymouth harbour.

It was a fine warm sunny day, just the kind to give a stranger a good impression of a country on the day of his arrival. Soon shore boats began to come out from the waterfront and we called out to the occupants for news. You will remember that we had no news at all during our eleven days at sea and were naturally hungry for the latest from the seat of war. We soon learned that Italy had come into the war on our side,⁸ that a coalition government had been formed, and that the war was still on. Later we learned that the 1st Canadian Division had been heavily engaged while we were at sea.

8 Italy entered the war on May 20, 1915.

VI TRAINING IN ENGLAND

Now all the youth of England are on fire,
And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies:
Now thrive the armourers, and honour's thought
Reigns solely in the breast of every man:

– Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Act II, Prologue

We lay out in the harbour all afternoon waiting for the tide. From the decks we could see the famous Plymouth Hoe where the historic game of bowls was being played in July, 1588, when the Spanish Armada was reported in the Channel. Since that time, no greater crisis and danger had ever menaced the British than the one we were now facing. Small bodies of troops were visible here and there on the shore, all actively engaged in training exercises.

At 5 p.m., the tide being in flood, a tug made fast and towed our ship up the river Dart to the Devonport docks. As we passed the training ships in the upper harbour the cadets swarmed into the rigging by the hundreds and cheered us tremendously. Many people out in small pleasure craft, and those lining the shores, added their acclamations to the welcoming cheers of the cadets. It was indeed a wonderful and inspiring reception. To many on our ship it was a home coming reception, but to those of us born in Canada it had a different significance. What impressed us most was the volume and heartiness of the cheering. We had never heard anything like it before, for we in Canada are not a cheering people, and a spontaneous outburst of applause or acclaim is rare amongst us. Even when our crowds are deeply moved emotionally they are apt to remain glum and silent. For these reasons the warmth of the reception we received at Devonport was a revelation to many of us.

After we docked, a Royal Army Medical Corps officer came on board and inspected my sick state, keeping a copy. We had no cases of serious illness on board requiring admission to the Plymouth Military Hospital and I decided to take the few minor cases along with us on the train the following morning. The scarlet fever suspect was released from quarantine as he had shown no definite evidence of the disease. Soon after

docking we had our last dinner on board the *Carpathia* and one of the officers appeared at table for the first time since we had left Quebec. His entry into the dining room was greeted with cheers. Just before dark, two destroyers came into the inner harbour and each dropped anchor not far away from our dock.

We were billed for an early entrainment for the Shorncliffe military area the following morning so we were all up at an early hour. It was a beautiful dewy May morning with a bright sun shining. I was struck with the vigorous dampness and freshness of the vegetation, and the deep vivid greenness of the grass and leaves. Passing trains attracted my attention, and I wondered at the tiny locomotives and coaches. I noticed the whistles of the engines particularly; the sound seemed so feeble and futile after the raucous blasts of the engines I had been accustomed to hear in Canada.

I notified the Quartermaster Officer of Brigade that I was taking my battalion sick on the train with us, and supposed that he would notify Division by wire so that our unit could be relieved of them upon reaching our destination. He probably sent word ahead; but as events proved, it was without effect. We bid goodbye to the old *Carpathia* which had been our home for nearly two weeks and which had landed us safe at our destination. However, the men could not overlook or forget the abominable food that had been served them on the voyage, and I do not think that there were many tears shed by the original members of our unit when she was torpedoed and sunk three years later.¹

At 7 a.m. I went with the first train that left Devonport for Shorncliffe, and we had a delightful journey across that part of England. What impressed me most was the richness and greenness of the grass and vegetation rather than the trim and well kept aspect of the countryside, for I expected the latter. I was also rather surprised to find the country so well wooded. For a fair portion of the journey we seemed to be running through the open glades of a forest. We passed through innumerable towns and villages and I particularly remember Taunton in Devonshire because of its historical associations. I also recall that we had a distant

1 On July 17, 1918, the *Carpathia* was travelling in a convoy bound for Boston when she was struck by three torpedoes. Five of the crew were killed by the explosions. The remainder and the fifty-seven passengers aboard were rescued and safely brought to Liverpool. The *Carpathia* sank later that day.

glimpse of the famous white horse outlined on a hillside several miles to the north of our route.² We had also a sight of Exeter cathedral as we went through that city. We reached London late in the afternoon and stopped for a few minutes at the Cannon Street Station.

We arrived at Shorncliffe Station at 7 p.m. and detrained. The two companies of the 31st Battalion and the Borden Machine Gun Battery marched off to Dibgate camp some two or three miles distant, while I remained for some time at the station waiting for a conveyance for my seven sick men who were unable to march. I confidently expected that an ambulance wagon would meet the train as such an arrangement did not seem to me to presuppose any very high state of organization on the part of our division whose headquarters were already in the Shorncliffe area. Finally I requisitioned a transport wagon that was going to the camp, loaded my sick on to it with an orderly, and proceeded to follow by foot. Rain was now falling.

When I reached camp after dark I found a state of general confusion. Unpitched tents had been thrown on the ground in some sort of order, but other than that, no preparations for our reception appeared to have been made. I was pleased to find, however, that my orderlies had pitched a tent, and, having secured blankets, made the seven sick comfortable for the night, although without rations.

I do not know how the men fared for food, but late at night Major Spurgeon Campbell and Major McGuffin of the 4th Canadian Field Ambulance, already in camp, looked up some of our officers and took us down to their mess for a drink and a good meal. While we were enjoying their hospitality, the officers imparted much useful information as to the camp and routine activities. For one thing, I learned what course I might take to evacuate my sick in the morning and thereafter.

After our entertainment at the mess we got tents pitched, hunted up our roll beds and went to sleep after a long hard day. I can still see Major Spurgeon Campbell as he came looking for us through the rain and dark, carrying an old stable lantern to light him on his way. It was indeed a beacon of light to us, cold, wet, hungry and tired as we were.

2 The outline was crafted by removing the turf to expose the underlying white chalk. The most famous white horse outline is at Uffington, Berkshire, but McGill's route probably took him within sight of the next most famous, the one at Westbury, in Wiltshire.

I hope that if any member of the 4th Field Ambulance ever reads this he may understand that the kind treatment accorded the 31st Battalion officers has not been forgotten.

The next morning, May 30, was clear and fine. Rations arrived, and before evening the camp was in some sort of order. The officers and men had all been allotted tents. Captain Palmer, the paymaster, and I shared one of them.

Dibgate Plain, really more like a flat-topped hill than a plain, was a well chosen site for a military camp except that there was a dense clayey subsoil overlying chalk which made the surface almost impervious to water. I suppose the site was a few hundred acres in extent, almost perfectly level and devoid of trees, with a northern boundary where the field merged gradually with the Kentish uplands. The other three sides sloped abruptly down. On the south the plain was separated from the sea beach several hundreds of feet below by a steep slope that was almost a precipice. The Folkestone-Hythe road ran along between the foot of the hill and the sea. On its east and west sides the plain was marked off by deep narrow valleys, or ravines, as we would call them in Canada. Across the valley to the east was another small tableland similar to our campsite, known as Sir John Moore's Plain, upon which was situated Moore Barracks Military Hospital.

A golf course occupied the high ground across the valley to the west. Officers' quarters were at the south end of Dibgate Plain overlooking the sea of which we could view a wide expanse in fine weather. Every night we could see the Dungeness lighthouse blinking out its signal to ships in the English Channel, while on clear evenings we could clearly discern the coast of France across the Straits of Dover to the southeast, and even make out houses with the aid of our field glasses.

Within a few days the 28th and 29th Battalions arrived and the "Iron Sixth" Brigade began its corporate existence, all of its component units being together for the first time. Personally, I found my work here more or less of a holiday after my winter in Calgary. In the first place, a brigade duty roster was made out for the medical officers, with the result that each of us had three evenings out of four off duty. Each day, one of the four M.O.s was Brigade orderly medical officer and had to remain in camp for twenty-four hours. Secondly, we did not have to attend our own sick in hospital, but evacuated them to Moore Barracks Hospital whence they passed from under our care. Furthermore, there were no inoculations or vaccinations to do and no recruits to examine. Alto-

gether, I thoroughly enjoyed the five or six weeks we spent on Dibgate Plain.

On the first Sunday afternoon after our establishment at Dibgate the camp was nearly deserted because there were so many places of interest to visit. I remained in camp all day and had a visit from Lieut.-Col. Jacques, the Deputy Assistant Director of Medical Services of the 2nd Canadian Division. As this was the first personal contact I had had from a superior officer of the medical service since joining the army over five months before, I made use of the opportunity to obtain a little information as to my duties, privileges, etc. I acquired still more on June 2 when all of the medical officers of the 2nd Division were called to Divisional Headquarters for an interview and instruction in some of our duties by the Assistant Director of Medical Services, Colonel Fotheringham.

The following day the brigade was inspected by Major-General S. B. Steele, the divisional commander. The M.O. is excused most parades, but is supposed to be present at an inspection by a general officer. On this occasion the Assistant Director of Medical Services had ordered all the medical officers to gather at East Sandling, a few miles away, to meet General Carleton Jones, the Director of Medical Services, Canadians. Here was a conflict of orders. I elected to follow the direct orders of the Assistant Director of Medical Services rather than the implied order of the Brigade to appear on inspection parade. I felt that the Brigade and Divisional authorities could fight the matter out between themselves. For the record, I may say that the brigade headquarters wrote to my commanding officer demanding an explanation of my absence that afternoon, thus demonstrating beyond all possible doubt the alertness of the brigade staff on matters of proper military procedure.

On the afternoon in question, June 3, Captain Cullum, M.O. of the 28th Battalion, and I rode out to East Sandling where we met the other medical officers of the division. General Jones gave us a very interesting talk, but we had a much more useful and instructive one with Captain Mothersill of the 1st Division. Mothersill, who was now convalescent in England, had been medical officer of the 8th Battalion when he was severely wounded on April 22.³ He had actually been on duty at the

3 Before the outbreak of war, Surgeon-Major George Sydney Mothersill, a native of Ottawa, was practising medicine in Winnipeg where he was also attached to the 90th Winnipeg Rifles as medical officer. He enlisted at the outbreak of war, and when the

front in a general engagement and was able to impart a deal of useful information and a fair idea of the conditions that we might expect to encounter.

During the first part of June the days were bright and sunny, but sometimes the nights were uncomfortably cold. One night we had a June frost which surprised me for I thought that kind of thing was not done in the south of England. I believe the strawberry crop was somewhat injured.

Battalion training went on with renewed activity, including many interesting route marches. These route marches began to tell on the strength of a few of the older men, some of them manifestly over the military age. One of them, a Scot, who must have been at least sixty, found that he could not stand the pace, and after falling out of a couple of marches, reported to me almost in tears. I looked up his medical history and said to him,

“Cline I see that you are recorded as being of the maximum age, forty-four years.”

“Ah weel,” he replied in a resigned tone of voice, “I must tell ye that I’m a wee bit older nor that.”

Stretcher bearers, water squad and sanitary section details were given daily instruction. I also gave a lecture to one platoon each day on first aid to the wounded. On July 1 we had a half holiday in camp.

In spite of the rigorous military training the majority of us had considerable leisure to enjoy our surroundings. The men were given home leave as rapidly as possible, and quite a number would be away on leave upon any particular date. As a large proportion of our personnel had been born in the British Isles this leave was greatly appreciated. I did not take official leave myself as I had no friends or relatives in England. I spent a couple of weekends in London, and there were many places close by like Folkestone, Hythe, and Sandgate, which were all worthy of a visit and full of interest to one in the country for the first time. In the evenings I would often walk across to Moore Barracks Hospital or down to the Sandgate Military Hospital to see any of our men who happened to be there. From time to time we had visits from members of the

8th Battalion was recruited from the 90th Rifles along with the 99th Manitoba Rangers and regiments from western Ontario, Mothersill was appointed Surgeon and Medical Officer of the new battalion. It sailed overseas on October 3, 1914, as part of the 1st Canadian Contingent. At the time of his wounding, the 8th Battalion had been in the trenches, on and off, since February 7. “Ottawans Wounded.” *The Ottawa Evening Journal*, Ottawa, 28 April 1915, 16.

1st Division who had been wounded or were on leave. Needless to say we looked upon these favoured individuals with great awe and respect, and listened attentively to everything they had to tell us, which was quite a lot.

Early in July, the 29th and 31st Battalions received orders to move to Lydd for training in rifle shooting. On July 9 we marched out of camp to the west, wound down the steep hill leading to the lower Folkestone road and proceeded in a south-westerly direction towards Lydd, about 15 miles distant. We shortly passed through Hythe, where the small arms school was situated and continued on our way. West of Hythe the low flat coastal region known as the Romney Marshes broadens out to a width of several miles. This stretch of country is no longer marsh land in the strict sense of the word, for it is all drained and under cultivation or in pasture. In this vicinity the coast is protected by sea walls or dykes.

The sea coast bears off to the southwest to form the eastern boundary of the triangular spit of sand dunes known as Dungeness, where the lighthouse is located. Lydd, the village from which the explosive lyddite derives its name, is at the base of the triangle. The sand dunes of the area are used for musketry training and as testing grounds for the British artillery. The district south of the village was dotted with old pieces of heavy artillery that had been discarded as obsolete.

The day of our march to Lydd was fine and the going fairly good, although many of the men suffered from sore feet because of new boots that had been issued a few days before. On our way we passed through the old villages of Dymchurch and New Romney before reaching our very comfortable camp in the evening. After mess a number of us wandered up to and about the village. There is a fine old church in Lydd of which parts of the foundation, we were told, antedated the Norman Conquest. Certain memorial tablets on the walls had been put in place during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. On a street corner, I remember noticing an old house with an inscription on a stone in a wall giving the date of erection which was prior to the revolution of 1688. To those of us born in Canada these evidences of the great age and long history of the little out-of-the-way village were very impressive.

Altogether we had a pleasant three weeks at Lydd. The campsite, although only a few feet above high tide, was well located upon a gravel subsoil, which made drainage problems less difficult than at Dibgate. It was well that this was so, for the weather, though warm and pleasant, was very rainy. The musketry practice did not exhaust the men, hence they felt more like indulging in football and other sports than when

heavy route marches were the order of the day. I remember one evening during a football match an enthusiastic 31st Battalion supporter kept calling insistently for them to score without delay as defaulters' call⁴ would be blown within a few minutes whereupon they would lose half their team.

It is strange how clearly little details of trivial incidents will remain in one's memory when the recollection of really important events has faded completely. Every morning the ration party would pass the medical inspection tent, usually a few minutes after the completion of sick parade. Often, while I sat at the table making out my reports, I could overhear conversations. Some of the remarks were more amusing than edifying. I can recall one morning overhearing a free discussion on the amount and quality of the rations just issued.

"Well, there is one thing that can be said for the issue this morning," remarked one of the party, "we've been given a liberal ration of mustard."

"Yes," replied another, "now what we need is some meat to put the bloody mustard on."

A few miles north of Dibgate Plain there is a fine old country house and estate named Beechborough. The property belonged to Sir Arthur Markham, then a member of the British House of Commons. Sir Arthur and Lady Markham had given up the house, or most of it, for hospital purposes.

The only time I ever visited the house was on a Sunday afternoon, shortly after our arrival in England. Dr. T. Costello had just come over from Canada and called to see me at Dibgate camp where he told me that Dr. Charles Stewart, also of Calgary, was on duty at Beechborough. He suggested we walk over, which we did. We met Dr. Stewart who introduced us to Sir Arthur and Lady Markham who were down from London for the weekend. After looking over the house and a portion of the grounds we had afternoon tea with our host and hostess.

The spacious grounds, large enough to accommodate a division, were often used for inspections and ceremonial parades. About the middle of July the units of the 2nd Division received orders to parade there on the morning of July 17 for an inspection by Sir Robert Borden, Major-General Sir Sam Hughes, and Mr. R. B. Bennett.

4 Defaulters were the soldiers guilty of a military offence.

On the afternoon of July 16 our battalion marched out of the camp at Lydd for Dibgate, which would be our base for the inspection operation the following day. Rain fell during the march but otherwise the day was without incident. Upon arrival we were billeted with the 28th Battalion, and the 27th took care of the 29th Battalion. A heavy rain poured incessantly all night and the tents were overcrowded. Nevertheless we all had a more comfortable night than might have been expected. Certainly the officers, N.C.O.s and men of our host battalion did everything in their power to make our stay as pleasant as possible.

The next morning was gloomy from a dark and overcast sky with rain threatening every moment. In accord with Brigade orders we turned out without raincoats. The parade ground was ankle deep in mud, and on the whole the outlook was not inspiring. However, soon after we moved off and got under way a watery sun broke out and prospects brightened considerably. We were certainly not troubled with dust on the way to Beechborough, and there was a clean fresh smell to the rain-washed air. Soon everybody was in better temper and more satisfied with the program of the day. The hour of inspection had been set for 10 a.m. and before that hour the three infantry brigades of the 2nd Division were drawn up in mass formation in the Beechborough grounds. I had never seen so many troops assembled before. We had good firm grassy turf for footing, and as the rain kept away everybody was happy. While awaiting the hour of inspection the men sang "Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here" and other songs of an equally inspiring character.

The inspection passed off without any incident worthy of particular notice. At the conclusion the officers were all ordered to fall out to hear a short address by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden. When we had all gathered into a group for this purpose Major-General Steele called us all to attention, and we stood in that attitude throughout the speech of the Prime Minister, which fortunately was not unduly prolonged. So far as the Division Commanding Officer was concerned, we might all have been standing to attention still, for he issued no further orders. At the end of the performance we simply walked away.

This little incident made a most unfavourable impression on the minds of many of those present, including my own. I heard the matter remarked upon later, and none of us could understand why a divisional commander should have considered such action necessary or in good taste. It is my firm opinion that from then on the confidence and respect that the officers of his division might have felt in regard to General Steele rapidly declined. As a consequence, when Major-General Turner

V.C., was placed in command of the division shortly afterwards there was a feeling of profound relief, among many of us at least. We felt that a general officer that felt it necessary to resort to such a petty show of authority was no man to command a division in the field.

The truth was that Major-General Steele had undertaken a command for which he was unfitted either by training or experience, and he had passed the age when it might have been possible for him to adapt himself to new and unfamiliar conditions. He had made a fine reputation for himself during many years service in the R.N.W.M.P, and later as commander of the Lord Strathcona's Horse in South Africa. He had also obtained distinction as District Officer Commanding Military District 13 and afterwards in Military District 10. However, the command of an infantry division required qualities beyond those that had made him so successful in smaller spheres of action. I do not think that his many friends and admirers will now claim that he was capable of making a success of the undertaking that had been thrust upon him.

After the inspection the 6th Brigade marched back to Dibgate where we had lunch. In the afternoon the two battalions from Lydd marched back to our camp, thus ending a hard and busy day. I have an entry in my diary, dated July 22, to the effect that one of the men left for Canada that day, having been invalided by a medical board because of heart trouble following an attack of rheumatism. I also noted that, while tonsillitis was less common than in Canada, rheumatism and allied troubles were much more prevalent.

By the end of the month the two battalions had finished their musketry training at Lydd, and on July 31 we marched a distance of about 15 miles almost directly north to Otterpool Camp situated on the high ground north of Lymne. The day was very hot and we went into a heavy thunderstorm en route. We had the high steep hill, a continuation of that at Dibgate, to climb again. The other two units of the brigade had moved up from Dibgate, and we were all together once more.

Outside of the shortage of water, Otterpool camp was satisfactory in every way, well and conveniently situated in a beautiful countryside. Westenhanger railway station was only a few minutes' walk away and the Folkestone bus had a regular service to the camp. Sheep raising seemed to be one of the chief agricultural activities and we all marveled at the number of these animals to be seen in the fields or being driven along the roads. I remember that one day orders prohibited the use of army transport on the roads for certain hours because of an annual lamb sale that was being held in one of the villages.

On August 4, the 2nd Division was again inspected, this time by Major-General Sir Sam Hughes and Mr. Bonar Law.⁵ General Hughes gave an address in Folkestone that evening, but for reasons explained in an earlier chapter, I refrained from attending. A few days later, before his departure for Calgary, Mr. Bennett came to Otterpool where he addressed our battalion in a few well chosen words. He knew that we were about to leave for the front and that we should probably be in action before he would see us again. I think these thoughts influenced the tone of his talk and caused him to exhibit emotion as he said farewell and wished us good fortune.

We were now definitely engaged in brigade and divisional training. On August 10 the 6th Brigade marched out of our lines at 2 p.m. and after a march of a few miles went into bivouac for the night in a field at Blackwell farm. I shall always remember that night for in the evening I was called to see one of the men who seemed quite ill. I sent him to the hospital where he later died of pneumonia.⁶ His was the first death from sickness that we had had in the battalion since mobilization. The day following we engaged in a sham battle, I believe with one of the other brigades of the division, but I am not certain. In any case it was a splendid outing, for the weather was ideal.

From August 23 to August 26, inclusive, the division was engaged in training operations and manoeuvres in the vicinity of Wye. The first

5 New Brunswick-born British Statesman Andrew Bonar Law was opposition leader in the British House of Commons, and Colonial Secretary in Prime Minister Lord Asquith's recently formed Coalition Government.

6 Private Alfred Frederick Shaw, who was living in the Rocky Mountain House district prior to his enlistment at Red Deer, died on September 11 at age 21. His obituary, which appeared on the front page of the local paper on October 8, reads as follows: "On the last mail Mr. Shaw received further particulars of the death of his son, Alfred, from his sister, Miss Shaw, who resides in London. Miss Shaw had been with her nephew for a few days before the end came and she speaks in the highest terms of the splendid care given the deceased who died from pneumonia in the military hospital at Shorncliffe at four o'clock in the afternoon of September 11th and was buried with full military honors on September 11th. The dying soldier particularly requested that the news of his death be broken gently to his parents, and with the words 'fix bayonets' still fresh upon his lips he passed peacefully away. Deceased was a young farmer from this district. He left here about a year ago to join the 31st Battalion. His parents were residing in North Vancouver, and his mother is still there. His father came here last year to look after the son's place during his absence at the front. The sympathy of all Canada will go out to the bereaved parents." *The Guide*, Rocky Mountain House, Vol. 6, No. 34, October 8, 1915. Shaw's funeral was held the day he died because of the unit's imminent departure for France.

operation in which the 31st Battalion took part was a night march of several miles at the end of which we went into bivouac in a field. We went into action the next morning and had a busy day. The weather was hot and the sky cloudless. A profusion of hop fields in the terrain of our operations provided concealment for the troops and shade from the sun. As the season was far advanced, the hop vines had attained a remarkable growth, and when we rode or walked between the rows of vines trellised overhead, we were completely protected from observation of the hypothetical enemy. I can vividly recall how cool and inviting a retreat from the heat of the sham battle these hop fields provided.

Throughout the full period of our divisional manoeuvres the weather remained fine and sunny. Our operations came to an end late in the exceedingly hot afternoon of August 26, whereupon the units reformed and marched back to Otterpool camp. Naturally there was a little disorganization. I found myself at the rear of the column with my stretcher bearer section. I do not exactly remember why this was so, but presume that I had lost time in gathering my bearers together from the different companies scattered about the field. At any rate, when we were all assembled we followed at some distance from the rear of the last unit in the column. As we proceeded we picked up a number of stragglers who had fallen out along the line of march. That there were stragglers was not to be wondered at, for all had been on the go since early morning under a boiling hot sun, followed by a long hard march on top of this. We continued to pick up stragglers by ones and twos. Soon I had quite a respectable following in point of numbers, but belonging to several different units. I remember that we met Mr. Winston Churchill⁷ who was in a motor car and evidently on his way back to London. I saw in the paper the following day that he had been down to Kent that afternoon, but forget the reason.

7 At this time Winston Churchill's political future seemed bleak. He held the minor office of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. When Britain's first wartime Coalition Government was announced by Liberal Prime Minister Lord Asquith on May 26, 1915, Lord Balfour was named First Lord of the Admiralty. As a condition of their joining the coalition, the Conservatives had stipulated that Churchill, the ardent advocate of the Dardanelles Campaign, who bore the brunt of the blame for the April 1915 landing disasters at Gallipoli, resign as First Lord of the Admiralty, a position he had held since 1911. On November 13, he also resigned as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, after being excluded from the new war committee of the Coalition Cabinet.

While still some distance out of camp we passed a large country house close to the road. It had a fine large lawn, shaded by magnificent trees under which a group of people were having tea. As I rode up opposite the gate with my nondescript military following, a lady came down from the tea party and asked me to bring my men in on the lawn as she would be pleased to serve them all tea. I was much surprised and gratified at this most generous proffer of hospitality, and expressed my thanks and appreciation in what I hoped might be considered a fitting manner. However, I declined the invitation with thanks, for I felt that an acceptance would have been an imposition, and, besides, I feared that if the men once got lying down on the grass under the shady trees sipping tea, the task of getting them on their way again would have been next to an impossible one.

But a still greater compliment was in store for us. As we approached our camp we had grown into quite a formidable armed party. The first area we reached was that occupied by one of the field ambulances of the division, close to the road. The ambulance sentry had evidently reported our approach to the sergeant of the guard and the latter, taking no chances, had turned out his guard and presented arms as we passed. As a word of explanation, guards of the field ambulance units were supplied by the Army Service Corps transport section, who were armed.

I never learned who the sergeant thought we were, but his action in turning out the guard and presenting arms gave us a highly improved opinion of ourselves; and put the men, who at once saw the joke, in a good humour before reaching home. When I realized what was taking place, I marched the men to attention and returned the salute in proper form.

VII THE MOVE TO FRANCE

I will lay odds that, ere this year expire,
We bear our civil swords and native fire
As far as France: I heard a bird so sing,
Whose music, to my thinking, pleased the King.

– Shakespeare, *King Henry IV*, Part II, Act V, Scene V

Our divisional training was now practically completed and all signs pointed toward an early movement of the division to France. Another milestone was about to be set in the progress of our unit from mobilization to service in the line. Just as had been the case in Canada six months before, speculation was rife as to the possible date of our departure. For several days the different units were marched in succession down to the divisional armoury shops in East Sandling for certain alterations in the Ross rifles.¹ These weapons were not entirely satisfactory, and were the source of serious misgivings on the part of the officers who knew most about them.

On September 2 we had our final divisional inspection before leaving England. We again marched down to Beechborough and assembled in the grounds there at 11 a.m. for inspection by His Majesty, the King, and Lord Kitchener. This was the first and only time I ever saw the distinguished soldier in whom the British people reposed such confidence. I think that he received a more close scrutiny from our men than did even the King.

Kitchener was indeed an impressive figure, mounted on a large white horse that showed up his splendid physique to perfection. In the march past I was in the very last section in the rear of the 31st Battalion and had a good opportunity to observe that keen glance and impassive countenance of which I had often read. The appearance of the man certainly inspired one with confidence.²

1 They were re-bored because dust particles, rain, or rapid fire caused them to jam. Roy, R. H., ed., *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 1914–1918, 26.

2 McGill to Emma Griffis, 9 September 1915. Harold and Emma McGill, f. 742, Glenbow Archives. “The review was a rather perfunctory affair and did not last long. A

We now knew that it would be only a matter of a few days before we received our orders to embark for France. On September 7 the first field dressings were issued to officers, N.C.O.s and men. Two or three hundred surplus dressings would be taken with the unit.

The period of our peace training had now nearly reached its end after almost a year of steady work in Canada and in England. Summer was rapidly coming to a close and autumn drawing in. Our summer in England had been a happy and pleasant one in spite of our hard training. Even now I can look back with pleasure to many an incident and Sunday excursion. The weather had been warm and pleasant throughout our time there with enough rain to maintain an agreeable degree of dampness in the air. However, one trying figure of life in camp was a veritable plague of wasps. We took this as one of the discomforts incidental to war, but were told by the inhabitants that the insects were present in unusual numbers. Whenever we opened a tin of jam the wasps would gather about in swarms. The marching and counter-marching were through beautiful country and over the best of roads. Wherever our columns went, moved or halted, we were always followed by swarms of hucksters and vendors. These pests along with the earwigs and wasps comprised the only unpleasant features of our camp life in England. Colonel Depree, our chief of division staff officer, defined a brigade as a body of men entirely surrounded by hawkers.

We had many a Sunday excursion into the country surrounding our various camps. The country was not only beautiful and picturesque, but contained many places of great historical interest. It must be remembered that we were in one of the oldest parts of England from the standpoint of authentic record. The site of an old Roman camp could be seen in almost any section. Among the evidences of more recent and stirring events in history was the series of round martello towers along the sea-coast. These had been erected as a defence against the threatened Napoleonic invasion over one hundred years before.

One fine Sunday Major Hewgill, Captain Myatt and I walked down from Dibgate to Saltwood Castle. I do not know who owned the place then, but it is now the Kent estate of Mr. Claude Bryan. The gardener showed us all over the place, and pointed out the window of the room

lot of other Canadian troops besides our division were being reviewed the same day. Lord Kitchener was mounted on a big white horse. He looked like a giant beside His Majesty. Somebody in our battalion remarked that the procedure was a sort of 'Hail Caesar! We that are about to die salute thee.'"

occupied by the conspirators the night before they went to Canterbury to murder Thomas à Becket.³

Motherwell of C Company treated himself to a Ford car while we were at Otterpool camp. This officer was deservedly very popular in the unit, and this popularity seemed to increase, if that were possible, after he brought his car into camp. It was a very busy piece of equipment until we left England. I remember that one Sunday a carload of us did a grand tour on a reduced scale. We had lunch in a country inn that was really delightful. I think the village was New Romney. Afterwards we drove to Hastings, then back as far as Canterbury for dinner and a visit to the cathedral. After dinner we went to Dover and returned by way of Folkestone. The statue of William Harvey had attracted my attention on the occasion of my first visit there, a few days after we landed in England. Harvey, who demonstrated the circulation of the blood, was born in Folkestone in April, 1578. Naturally the memorial to so famous a physician could not but excite the interest and respect of a member of the profession.

The 2nd Canadian Division was now being moved to the theatre of active operations in France and Belgium. The Division was going to France under the command of Major General Arthur Turner, V.C., who had won his Victoria Cross in the South African war and had commanded a brigade in the 1st Division just prior to the previously described August manoeuvres. Most of us saw him for the first time on that occasion, and at the conferences held at the close of each day's operations we had a fair opportunity to form an opinion of our new divisional commander.

I wonder if senior military officers, and those holding high offices in civil life, often pause to reflect upon the results of the close scrutiny to which they are subjected by their subordinates. I think that some, at least, do not: otherwise they surely would soon drop the ridiculous posing that many seem to think it necessary to adopt. We were favourably impressed with General Turner, who was entirely unaffected, and who did not consider it necessary to make everybody stand to attention during these discussions in order to place himself in a proper light before his officers.

3 Becket's murder at Canterbury Cathedral on December 29, 1170, was perpetrated by apprehensive courtiers of King Henry II in retaliation for the Archbishop's moves to assert clerical privilege over that of the state. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14th ed., s.v. "Becket, Thomas."

Our long summer evenings, so pleasant and delightful, that had enabled us to see so much of Kent County during the period of our training, were now a thing of the past. The night came on soon after mess, and on dark damp evenings it was more pleasant to either remain in camp or go down to Folkestone to pass the time at our disposal. We all felt that the English adventure was over, and that we would probably be in France within a week.

Moving orders arrived during the second week of September. At 1 p.m., September 14, the advance party, consisting of Major Hewgill in command, Lieutenant Sproston, transport officer, Lieutenant F. R. Martin, machine gun officer and 105 other ranks marched out of Otterpool camp to entrain at Shorncliffe station for Southampton, the port of embarkation. This advance party included all of the transport and machine gun sections. We sent all of our medical equipment, except the surgical haversack, in the maltese cart with the transport. As no shaft harness had been provided for the cart the latter left camp tied on behind a general service wagon. Orderly Willis went with the advance party in charge of the medical stores. After they had set out a drizzling rain began to fall and the night set in very thick and dark.

It was understood that the remainder of the battalion would follow the advance party within a couple of days and would sail from Folkestone. The whole division was on the move, but I shall confine my account of military movements for the few days following to those of the unit to which I was attached. During September 15 we were all busy with preparations for departure the following day. I cleared all sick and unfit to hospital. On September 16, I renewed all medical sheets that had not been returned with men discharged from hospital. The men were all given a formaldehyde solution foot bath. That is to say, they were all marched through tubs of this solution for the purpose of toughening the skin of the feet. Corporal Hardie of the C.A.M.C. water squad evidently had little taste for active service, and had effected a transfer through the C.A.M.C. depot at Shorncliffe. It took effect upon the last day of our stay at Otterpool whereupon Hardie's place was taken by Private Crease. I had Private A. F. Collin promoted to the rank of corporal in charge of the water squad.

The weather on September 16 was dry, but close and cloudy, bad marching weather. At 6 p.m. in the evening the 31st Battalion, as part of the 6th Brigade, marched out of Otterpool camp for Folkestone, the point of embarkation. The marching out state of our unit showed 919, all ranks, including 29 officers. Men and officers carried heavy

marching order, and the former had in addition a blanket, a ground sheet and 120 rounds of ammunition. The total weight carried by each man must have been between seventy and eighty pounds, entirely too heavy for a long march. By the time we passed through Hyde at 8:15 p.m. the weight carried and the rapid pace was beginning to tell upon the men and a few were falling out. The pace became easier after we passed through Hythe and marched to Sandgate by the lower Sandgate road. At 10 p.m. the unit was halted on the roadside waiting for orders. The night was inky black. A rumour began to pass through the ranks that the boat sailings had been cancelled because of mines in the Channel, and that the whole brigade was to march back and up the hill above Folkestone to bivouac on Sir John Moore's Plain for the night. And indeed, at 12:15 a.m. the battalion received orders to about turn, and began a weary march up the hill to Sir John Moore's Plain. The night was intensely dark. Quite a few of the men fell out along the line of march, and I presume they slept wherever they dropped.

We reached the bivouac area at 1:30 a.m., September 17, with a large number of the unit missing. The men were very tired and slept wherever they happened to halt. Quite a few paraded after daylight complaining of sore feet. One sick was admitted to hospital which was quite close to our bivouac. The C.A.M.C. squad had come into camp intact. All of the stragglers arrived in the course of the forenoon. The men were in surprisingly good spirits after the gruelling march with such an unsatisfactory ending. At 9:30 p.m. the other three battalions of the brigade marched out for embarkation at Folkestone.

Throughout the day of September 18 the 31st Battalion remained in bivouac. Fortunately the weather remained fine with no rain and the men were in excellent spirits. Three sick were admitted to hospital in the course of the day. At 4:30 p.m. the unit fell in on parade preparatory to moving off and one-half-hour later the battalion began the march to Folkestone pier which we reached at 6:15 p.m. Here we embarked on board the *Duchess of Argyle*, a little vessel almost like a toy ship. She was thoroughly loaded and crowded when all the unit was on board. The boat sailed at 7:10 on a fine clear night with an almost full moon. As we crossed the straits we caught an occasional glimpse of our destroyer escort but saw nothing else out of the ordinary. At 9:30 p.m. we docked at Boulogne. We were in France at last.

Disembarkation took but a few minutes. Following this we marched up a long steep slope for a couple of miles to a rest camp on a hill overlooking Boulogne. It was quite a comfortable camp, and we spent the

night there under canvass. Most of the blankets supplied to us had holes cut in the centre, after the manner of a Gaucho's, to make an aperture for the wearer's head. They had evidently been worn for rain sheets the previous winter. This rest camp was called Ostronove and, in the years to follow it sheltered many a man on his way to leave in "Blighty."⁴ It was never my good or ill fortune to spend another night in it, but on my too infrequent leave journeys I was reminded of its existence by the fervent curses of subalterns who had been detailed to march a squad of men up the hill to spend the night there while waiting for the leave boat in the morning.

We turned out at 5 a.m. on September 19 and began preparations for leaving camp. A few men paraded sick but none was left behind when we marched out at 9:15. As we marched through the streets of Boulogne I was attracted by some of the signs over the shop windows. One read "English spoken here, Coffee, Whisky." We marched straight to the train and went on board. I sat in a compartment with the Commanding Officer and one or two others, among them a French soldier who had been attached to our unit as interpreter that morning. I forget his name as he remained with us only a few days, being replaced by another named Gage.

At 10:30 the train pulled out and we felt that at last we were on our way to the front. We did not have so far to go, but the train was so slow that we did not reach Calais until noon. Another hour brought us to St. Omer, at that time the British General Headquarters. At 3 p.m. we reached Cassel, our railhead, and detrained. Cassel is at the foot of a high steep hill, one of a chain running from west to east in this part of French Flanders and across the border into Belgium. We formed up for a march of a few miles eastward to our billeting area in the neighbourhood of a village called St. Sylvestre. The day was hot and dry and the roads dusty. Soon we joined up with our transport and machine gun sections which had preceded us from Otterpool several days before and had come via Havre.

As we marched eastward we became conscious of the signs of war for the first time. Like the girl at the siege of Lucknow, we seemed to be aware of the first, partly through the sense of hearing and partly through

4 Originally the corruption of an Indian term, it was the soldiers' slang for "England." Thus a "blighty" was a wound sufficiently serious to require the soldier be returned to England for treatment.

the sense of feeling.⁵ It was a low pitched continuous thudding and rumbling of low intensity but of immense volume drifting up to us from the direction in which we were headed. For a time it was difficult for me to determine exactly whether I received the impression as a sound, or felt the coarse vibration. For over three eventful years to follow this phenomenon was scarcely ever absent. It became part of one's unnoted environment; and it was only on the day of the armistice, more than three years later, that the sudden cessation of the sounds of artillery fire, and the startling effect produced, made us all aware of what a hubbub we had become accustomed to. We also saw, as well as heard, a sign of the business upon which we had come to engage. Far away to the north we could see an airplane cruising back and forth and surrounded by puffs of smoke from bursting shells. We were too far away to hear the sounds of the explosions, but knew at once, without being told, what the scene meant.

The day had been bright and warm, and the country side looked peaceful and pretty. It was fairly well treed, and intersected with water courses, along the banks of which grew those peculiar stunted willows with thick trunks, the appearance of which had already become familiar to us in war pictures. We were in French Flanders where the farms were placed in detached units, each with its brick house with red tiled roof and the attached out buildings.

At 6 p.m. we reached the billet for Battalion Headquarters and the companies went on to the different farms that had been allotted them. We located the orderly room in the farmhouse that had been assigned us. There was a bedroom for the commanding officer, but the balance of the headquarters officers were given the farm yard for sleeping quarters, where we might lay out our bed rolls and sleep under the stars. This was not as bad as it might appear. There were several large trees in the yard, and the ground was fairly clean in spite of the fact that we shared occupancy with a herd of huge swine.

The season was advancing, and darkness came early. Situated as we were, we had nothing to do but crawl into our sleeping bags when dark-

5 In May 1857, during British rule, mutineers laid siege to the Residency, the seat of the chief commissioner at Lucknow, a city in Upper India. The "girl" to whom McGill refers was actually Jessie Brown, the wife of Corporal Brown. After falling into a deep slumber brought on by fever and exhaustion Jessie suddenly awoke, proclaiming that the garrison was saved for she could hear the sound of Highland pipers in the distance. Harold likely read the story when a school boy.

ness fell. We were comfortable enough, and the hogs kindly refrained from walking over us. I am usually able to sleep wherever I am, but this night the strangeness of our surroundings caused me to start into wakefulness several times, and on each occasion I heard from the east the continuous rumbling growl of the artillery. I had no means of knowing whether this sound came from our own or the enemy's guns.

Morning soon came, and after breakfast I was faced by a new problem. It was quite evident that I could not carry on with a battalion sick parade in the early morning with the companies scattered about in different farms. Hence I instituted company sick parades and placed them in charge of the respective senior stretcher bearers to whom I issued dressing pouches containing simple remedies. My plan was to have the stretcher bearers see those complaining in the mornings, and any that they did not feel competent to deal with I could see later when on my morning rounds. During this first day I made two rounds of the billets, beginning the first at 10:30 a.m. and the second at 3 p.m. I made use of the opportunity to do a little personal reconnaissance of our billeting area. I found and ate quite a few ripe raspberries. I also remember coming across a railway embankment guarded by French second line soldiers armed with their queer-looking French rifles with the long bayonets. During the day Private Baldry paraded sick. He had injured his foot the evening we left Folkestone, but had stuck it out and remained with the unit. He had a really severe injury and I sent him to the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance. This was our first casualty.

The following morning, September 21, was bright and fine. The usual steady roar of artillery had continued throughout the night, perceptibly louder and of greater volume than that of the night before. At 8:30 I began my rounds of the company billets but did not find any serious cases to deal with. At 11 a.m. the 6th Infantry Brigade was inspected by General Plumer, the Commanding Officer of the Second Army. He was the soldier that had won worldwide fame many years before when he raised the siege of Mafeking, and naturally we were all anxious to see so distinguished a commander.⁶ He inspected one battalion at a time

6 Herbert Charles Onslow Plumer raised the Rhodesian field force, which he commanded during the early months of the South African War. The siege of Mafeking, which lasted from October 12, 1899, to May 17, 1900, was lifted by the arrival of the northern field force led by Col. Plumer and the southern field force led by Col. Mahon, both of whom were credited with the town's relief. In May of 1915 General Plumer was selected to lead the 2nd Army on the Western Front. P B:— He would subsequently prove to be one of the British Expeditionary Force's ablest generals.

and gained the good will of the others by giving orders that they might lie down on the grass until each in turn came to be inspected. This considerate action on the part of the General made an excellent first impression.

The 6th Infantry Brigade was under orders to march forward to the zone of active operations the day following the inspection. The 2nd Canadian Division had taken over a section of the line in Belgium, and units of the other two brigades were already in action, i.e., holding front line trenches. When the battalion was paraded before marching off to the place of inspection, on September 21 Colonel Bell addressed the officers and men in a few appropriate words to the effect that we had now come to the place and time to do the work for which we had been training ourselves for nearly a year. He added that he had no doubt whatever that the performance of the unit would come up to his highest expectation.

The morning of September 22, 1915, broke fine and bright. It was, indeed, an almost perfect morning; warm with scarcely a breath of wind. I was up at 5:00 and began making my rounds of the billets at 6:15. I have a note in my diary that I saw Private Nunn, who was suffering from colic, at B Company billet. This man died the following summer from perforated peptic ulcer.⁷ Doubtless the abdominal pain from which he suffered the morning of the march came from this condition. He was the type of man who would never go sick unless in extreme distress. I made provision for several men with minor ailments to have their packs carried in the transport. There was one man, Private J. Wik, who was too ill to move and had to be left behind in billets. I presume that in wars of earlier times such cases were simply discarded, and left to the mercy of the civilian inhabitants, friendly or hostile as they happened to be.

By 8 a.m. we had assembled, and the brigade began its march for the front. The battalion transport sections were brigaded and followed in rear of the last battalion in the column, the 31st. As we were marching through the town of Caestre I fell out and called in to see Colonel Fotheringham, the Assistant Director of Medical Services for the 2nd Division, who had his headquarters there. Here I made arrangements to have Private Wik picked up by a motor ambulance.

7 Both the *C.E.F. Roll of Honour* and *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.* record Pte. Charles Nunn as killed in action on July 8, 1916.

The next village we traversed on our line of march was Flêtre, and we could see a few miles away to the north the mass of high ground called Mont des Cats. This was the second of a series of high detached hills that, beginning with Cassel on the west where we had detrained several days before, extends eastward across the Franco-Belgian frontier to end at Mont Kemmel in Belgium. These hills form a natural barrier to the advance of an invading army from the plains of Flanders to the Channel ports.

The day was hot and the road dusty. At noon we halted at the village of Meteren for lunch. Several of the men had fallen out. They were also using roadside water and filling their water bottles with beer bought at roadside estaminets, all evidence that the brigade had still something to learn of march discipline. During the afternoon we marched through the small city of Bailleul, an important military centre and headquarters of the Canadian Corps. In the spring of 1918, it was taken and destroyed by the Germans.

At 4:45 p.m. we reached our destination, a camp of huts called Alder-shot Camp, located a short distance behind the shelled and ruined village of Neuve Église. Half an hour after our arrival it was reported to me that Private Robertson of A Company had fallen off a wagon about a mile back from camp, and that a wheel had run over his hand. The casualty reported about 15 minutes later and showed a badly bruised hand but with the skin unbroken. Several of the men reported sick, three of them showing temperatures. We were supposed to clear our sick to the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance, but I had no idea where this unit was located. The Army Service Corps transport had failed to arrive with the blankets; water was short; and the men, looking forward to an uncomfortable night, were in a villainous temper.

We managed to pass the night after a fashion. I was allotted a corner of a hut occupied by the signallers. All night long I was disturbed by the steady roar of artillery and the buzz, buzz of the telephone instruments in the other end of the hut. I was separated from the signallers by a thin partition.

The noise of the artillery, which we had heard from our old quarters as a distant muttering growl, had swelled to an earth-shaking volume of sound, suggesting an impending calamity of some kind. My sleep was troubled and in my dream, or rather my nightmare, I was ever conscious of the constant buzzing of the telephone which disturbed me much more than the sound of the guns. I was obsessed with the notion that this

buzzing conveyed the direst forebodings. I was unable to read the messages, which I have no doubt were of an ordinary routine character, but I felt that they indicated a crisis in the war situation, perhaps a general attack on the part of the enemy. It would not have surprised me in the least to have opened my eyes and seen a German soldier standing over me and pointing a bayonet at my face or breast. I was not so worried by the roar of the guns: I knew what that was; but the uncertain and unknown nature of the telephone messages distressed me exceedingly.

Finally morning came, bright and clear, and with it my fears of the night vanished. I held sick parade at 6:30 a.m., and as was usual after a long march, had a long list reporting. One was Private G. Monck whom I sent to hospital. Another hospital case was Ben Jones. I found him to be suffering from aortic valvular disease of the heart. I did not expect to ever see him again as he was really medically unfit and I felt certain he would be discharged as such. However, he afterwards returned to the unit, became my batman, and was killed in our first great attack on the Somme a year later.

All day the very heavy bombardment continued, the noise coming chiefly from our right front.

In the evening we had a smart shower of rain, the first that had fallen for weeks. It was attributed of course to the artillery fire. This was a common belief at the time. The opinion that there was a causal relationship between intense artillery fire and rain was one strongly held by the troops then and for long after. Personally I do not think that there is a particle of evidence in support of it. The truth is that we were entering the rainy season of that part of the world, and the constant dampness to which we were subjected for months to come was quite independent of the bombardments. The rain storm on the evening of September 23 was unfortunate for us for some of the men were without shelter.

During the forenoon I had had a visit from Colonel Ross, Assistant Director of Medical Services for the 1st Division, and Major Chisholm. From them I learned that the 3rd Canadian Field Ambulance was camped close by and would clear our sick. I called at the lines of this unit which was under the command of Major J. A. Gunn of Winnipeg, and afterwards had lunch at their mess.

I held sick parade at 8:30 a.m. the next morning. A drizzling rain fell in the afternoon and the ground became very muddy. The heavy bombardment continued unabated throughout the night of September 24–25. Although we did not know it at the time, this bombardment was

the preparation for the great attack on Loos, September 25. We were also in blessed ignorance of the fact that our brigade formed part of the general army reserve for this action.

The forenoon of September 25 was misty and damp with scarcely a breath of wind. At 11 a.m. we had a demonstration on the use of gas protection devices from Captain Barley. That afternoon, at 4:30 p.m., we had a visit and speech from General Alderson, the Corps commander, and received orders to move into the line in front of Kemmel that night. The 28th Battalion was to take over a section of the front line while the 31st Battalion would go into the brigade support position.

While we were at Aldershot Camp some of our officers paid a visit to the front line in that area, then held by the 10th Battalion under Lieut.-Col. Ormond's command. Major Hewgill was one of the party to go up. They returned with fragments of a German shell that had burst in the trenches while they were there. The rest of us naturally felt the inferiority of our position, having as yet no actual contact with real warfare; and I, for one, had a strong inclination to emulate the adventurous conduct of our messmates. When I broached the subject to the Colonel he demurred, quite properly taking the stand that he would have some explaining to do if I became a casualty while on a sight-seeing tour. "Think of what a terrible thing it would be for me," he said, "if you were killed."

VIII BAPTISM OF FIRE

The time approaches
That will with due decision make us know
What we shall say we have, and what we owe.
Thoughts speculative their unsure hopes relate;
But certain issue strokes must arbitrate:

– Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene IV

At 9 p.m., September 25, the 6th Brigade marched out of Aldershot camp while the rain fell in a steady downpour. We passed through the ruined village of Neuve Église and the column swung northward, on the Kemmel road. The brigade was in close column of route, and followed a course parallel to and within a long rifle shot of the German line. The main transport moved by a back country road, but we had the machine gun limbers with us, their wheels making a devil of a row on the cobbled road. I have often wondered whose bright idea gave rise to this very dangerous and wholly unnecessary movement. Had the enemy known what we were up to, as he might very well have done, he could have given us terrible punishment with his field artillery, and even with machine gun fire. As we passed along the road we had plenty of evidence presented to us that there was a war on. We passed one of our battery positions that had been heavily shelled that very afternoon, and the sight of the fresh shell holes in the earth told us that we were now really at the war.

The march was not long as distance went, but was inexpressibly tedious, as we had to halt from time to time to allow relief parties to break away and go up the communications trenches to their assigned positions. Had the brigade been moved in small parties this difficulty might have been avoided. Fortunately the rain ceased and the sky cleared. The moon was nearly full, and as we came to Kemmel crossroads with its sign to the effect that the position was in view of the enemy, it seemed to us in the bright moonlight that we were plainly visible to every German in Belgium. At this crossroads the 31st Battalion turned west, passed through the village of Kemmel, followed the road

over the shoulder of the hill, and at 1:15 a.m., September 26, arrived at the support shelters behind Mont Kemmel.

Our battalion relieved the 16th Canadian Scottish at Kemmel Shelters, and our men took over the rather indifferent quarters. The battalion headquarters were in a farmhouse on the south side of the road. We had nothing to eat and no place to sleep, or at least no bedding, for our baggage had not arrived. I spent the balance of the night wrapped in my wet rain cloak and lying on the stone floor of the kitchen.

At 6 a.m. the weather was cold and foggy. There had been considerable enemy shelling during the night, but nothing fell near our billets. We secured some dry bread and hot coffee from the Belgian civilians and made that do for breakfast. I held sick parade at 6:50. Colonel Fotheringham called to see us around the noon hour and at 2 p.m. I went over the hill into Kemmel where A Company was billeted in close support. They asked me to have a water cart sent to their billets. This I had done and got into trouble with the brigade in consequence. The road over the hill was in plain view of the enemy, and no transport was supposed to use it in daylight. There were orders out to this effect of which I was ignorant. At 11 p.m. there was heavy firing towards the front and the battalion was ordered to "Stand to."

Kemmel Shelters, the quarters of the battalion in brigade support, consisted of a little cluster of farmhouses and attached out buildings scattered on both sides of the road. There were a few huts and a fair number of tents, all clustered at the foot of Mont Kemmel, a steep hill four or five hundred feet high and well treed at the top. The camp was located at the northwest corner and behind a ridge that extended northwards from the main mass of the Mont and which separated us from the village of Kemmel, about a mile away, in the direction of the enemy. Although quite close to the front line, the position was one of comparative safety, as we were well protected against both enemy ground observation and artillery by the Mont.

Mont Kemmel dominated the whole countryside. It was a beautiful feature, and in pre-war days had been a favourite picnic ground for excursion parties from Ypres, being connected therewith by a narrow gauge railway. At the time of our first occupation there was an estaminet or inn located at the top of the hill, in the charge of an old lady from whom wine and beer could still be purchased. Before the war, she had done a thriving business with summer excursionists.

The tourist business was at an end now, but the eastern slopes of the Mont were plentifully besprinkled with our artillery observation posts,

or O.P.s, from which one could obtain a wonderful view of the surrounding country. Directly opposite, across the valley to the east of Kemmel, lay the formidable German position of the Messines Ridge, crowned by the two villages, Messines and Wytschaete. Our trench lines ran along the western slope of this ridge, east of the Neuve Église-Kemmel road. To the southeast lay the village of Wulverghem, within our lines. To the northeast over the low flat country the famous city of Ypres was plainly visible, and in the mid-distance the town and lake of Dickebusch.

The camp which we now occupied was probably perfectly suitable for summer quarters, but with the approach of winter and the onset of almost continuous rains it presented certain disadvantages. The tents were not furnished with floor boards, and already the ground was becoming muddy. A quantity of dry straw was supplied us, but this soon became soggy and wet, besides making the quarters difficult to keep clean and sanitary. During our first day, September 26, our blankets and bed rolls arrived and we moved into the quarters assigned us. Captain Ross Palmer and I shared a tent in the yard of the house on the south side of the road. It was situated on ground likely to be flooded in a heavy rain.

With the cold and wet weather coming on, it was imperative that the men keep their feet in good condition and maintain a supply of dry socks. I had trouble persuading a few of the junior officers that it was their duty and not that of the medical officer to see that this was done. Nevertheless I did not fail to enquire into this matter when I made my daily camp inspections. I remember when I made rounds the morning after our arrival asking a bright attractive-looking young chap in one of the tents how he was off for socks. He was extremely happy in the somewhat depressing surroundings, assured me that he was "Jake" and that his auntie back in Canada would not let him want for socks. I took an instinctive liking to the lad, and have often wondered if he survived the war and what became of him.

During the first day in camp the men were kept busy cleaning up quarters and making themselves as comfortable as possible. As I have said the battalion was ordered to "stand to" at night as the enemy's artillery was particularly active.

September 27 was warm and pleasant, giving promise of better weather. After sick parade I walked over the hill into Kemmel village and found that the place had been heavily shelled during the night. A house beside the road had been completely demolished, and the wretched former occupants were searching among the debris for their belongings.

One poor old woman was carrying a flat iron about with her, apparently the only household utensil she had been able to salvage from the wreckage. Those of us in the army often discussed the fatuity that prompted these unfortunate inhabitants of the war zone to cling so persistently to their homes, situated as they were right under the snouts of the German guns. The only explanation we could think of was the fact that the civilians had literally no place to go. The back country was already crowded with refugees, and any addition to the number was a burden upon all concerned. Besides, it would seem that it was the policy of the Belgian government to encourage as many as possible to maintain themselves in the forward areas. They were certainly an embarrassment to the troops operating along the front, apart altogether from the question of espionage, which may not have been as serious as we supposed at the time.

It must be remembered that the war of movement had ceased months before in Belgium, and the antagonists now faced each other from lines of trenches, often only a few yards apart, and seldom separated by more than one or two hundred yards. The intervening space was known as "No Man's Land." These parallel lines of entrenchment stretched from Switzerland to the North Sea.

The 2nd Canadian Division was now holding a section of this line facing the Messines Ridge, at the southwest angle of the famous Ypres Salient.¹ Each Brigade held a portion of the section independently and carried out its own reliefs. We were joined on our right flank by the 1st Canadian Division whose line stretched southward in the direction of Ploegstreet, called Plugstreet by the troops, and Armentières.

The 6th Brigade held the front directly before Kemmel, the line running about midway between that village and Wytschaete within the German lines. A shallow valley lay between Kemmel and the Messines Ridge, along which ran a small stream or "beck" as it was called in Flanders. Our brigade garrisoned the position assigned us with two battalions in the front line, one in support at Kemmel Shelters and one in brigade

1 The Ypres Salient: That bulge in the allied lines formed around the medieval city of Ypres as a result of the heavy fighting of late 1914. The rim of the salient was defined by a series of long low ridges. Possession of these by the Germans provided observation sites along three sides enabling them to inflict heavy casualties. P B:— British determination to hold this ground at all costs, rather than withdraw to more defensible positions, turned the few tens of square kilometres into a giant cemetery by war's end. Some of the bloodiest of all the Canadian battles were fought here: Second Ypres in 1915, Mount Sorrel and St. Eloi in 1916, and Passchendaele in 1917.

reserve billeted in the village of Locre, a few miles west of Kemmel. The 27th and 29th Battalions relieved each other in the right of our sector while the 28th and 31st Battalions did the same in the left. The tour of duty was six days in and six out and our out periods alternated between Locre and Kemmel Shelters.

As already explained, our trenches were sited on the western slope of Messines Ridge occupied by the Germans. Their position was an exceptionally strong one, and it was nearly two years before they were shifted from it. Lieut.-Col. Bell once said to me that there was no such thing in the world as a perfect military position, but that Messines Ridge would have met all the requirements, had it not been for Mont Kemmel which overlooked it and furnished a means of ground observation.

The headquarters of the battalion holding the left half of the brigade front were in Kemmel at what is called the "Doctor's House," a brick building on the east side of the Ypres road, and a few yards north of Kemmel crossroads – that I mentioned as being within sight of the enemy. To the north of the east-west road as it passed through the village was a large park filled with a growth of fine beech trees. In the centre of these woods was Kemmel Château, a large moated château built of red brick. At the time of our first occupation of the area, its moat was the swimming place of several swans. When we first took over, Brigade Headquarters were in the Château, but within a short time they were shelled out and forced to move behind Mont Kemmel. During the day all traffic coming from the west was diverted through the château wood to avoid observation, and wheeled transport was allowed on the streets of Kemmel only at night.

The front held by the left half brigade was served by two communication trenches, somewhat awkwardly placed on the battalion flanks. The main trench, called the Via Gellia, began at the Ypres road, just to the north of and behind the Doctor's House. The Via Gellia which had its entrance sheltered from enemy view by trees, ran its zigzag way eastward through the low ground towards the ridge where our trenches were placed. As it approached the front line it came into dead ground under shelter of the ridge a few hundred yards from the fire trenches. Here it crossed the valley of a little brook and passed through an orchard. Except from artillery fire, one was quite safe out of the trenches in this area. On the south side of the trench was a well-timbered little dugout, unoccupied when we first took over the sector. The place was called Beaver Hat. Forward from this position the ground sloped upward to the front line through abandoned chicory fields.

The other communication trench started at Lindenhoeck, a hamlet at the crossroads less than a mile south of Kemmel, and ran eastward almost parallel to a surfaced road. A short distance behind the front line this trench ran out into another area of dead ground behind a fairly steep ridge, affording even better shelter than the place to the north just described. A number of shallow dugouts had been driven into the hill, and the place was known as the Regent Street Dugouts.

During the afternoon of September 28 I paid a visit to the 28th Battalion firing line, going in by way of Via Gellia. I visited the Regimental Aid Post which was in a house in Kemmel just to the west of the crossroads referred to earlier. This house was on the south side of the street at the point where those walking forward on the street were diverted through the Château woods by a sentry posted at the door for that purpose. After my tour of inspection through the front line, I came to the conclusion that this aid post was much too far away from the front, and at once thought of Beaver Hat, the little dugout I had seen in the orchard along the Via Gellia.

The weather broke during the night of September 28, and at 6:30 the next morning the rain was pouring down with a high north wind. During the day I received a supply of nine hundred tubes of iodine from the 6th Field Ambulance, then located at the convent hospice, at Locre. The next day I paid a visit to the headquarters of our brigade in Kemmel Château and had lunch with the staff. After lunch I was asked to see a little Belgian child ill with the croup. I sent the people a little Friar's balsam² with directions for its use, but we had no cough medicine in our stores suitable for such a young child. Artillery fire became more active in the afternoon. The rain continued all day, and by 8:30 p.m. was coming down faster than ever.

The morning of September 30 was chilly and windy with intermittent showers of rain. The battalion was under orders to take over the front line from the 28th that night. At 10 a.m. I made a sanitary inspection of the camp which I found in better condition than on the day before. It was important that the quarters be left in clean condition for the incoming unit. At 11:00 I issued the iodine tubes to the company quartermaster sergeants. From 2 to 5 p.m., I made a tour of the trenches that we were to take over, going in by Pall Mall, the Lindenhoeck communica-

2 Friar's balsam was a tincture of bensoin compound used for healing and soothing wounds.

tion trench, and Regent Street Dugouts; and returning by way of Via Gellia. I was impressed by the suitability of these dugouts as a location for the aid post. The trenches were becoming muddy. There were trench mats or duckboards in the communication trenches, but the sides were not revetted; i.e., timbered with stakes, and would likely fall in with more rain.

At 6:30 p.m. the battalion began moving out of the Kemmel Shelters for the front. Artillery fire was active on both sides. When I was returning from the trenches in the afternoon the enemy was using his artillery on our line, and I had heard for the first time that discordant menacing screech of a shell in transit. At 7 p.m. I left for the front in company with Captain Palmer, Corporal Bright and Private Macqualter, C.A.M.C., one of my water duty details. I had decided to place Macqualter at Regent Street Dugouts. He was a well trained and reliable first aid man, and I felt that he could do good work well forward of the Kemmel aid post, which as I have explained, was too far behind the line.

A heavy bombardment was in progress, chiefly from our side. As we reached the crest of the ridge over which the road went into Kemmel we had presented to us a fine and rather terrifying sight. It was now dark, and the crash of the guns with the lightning-like flashes were very impressive. I confess that I was conscious of a clutch about the heart. The spectacle made one think that it must be a convulsion of nature rather than the handiwork of such a feeble creature as man. For the first, although by no means the last time in my experience, I felt that horrible sinking feeling as though I had been disembowelled. Besides being appalled by the sights and sounds, I was struck by the fear that the village of Kemmel might be shelled while our men were still passing through. My fears seemed ridiculous in retrospect the next morning, for the little show we had witnessed was a mere incident. Nevertheless all the little details are as clear in my memory as they were the following day, and have never been effaced by the much more stupendous war scenes of later years.

At 7:45 we reached our Regimental Aid Post at the Château barrier in Kemmel. The village had not been shelled and our fears had been out of place. The bombardment was now dying down. At half past nine our cart arrived with the medical supplies. After unloading these we sent the cart back to the transport lines. Macqualter went forward to find the Regent Street Dugouts.

The first night of our occupation passed quietly, no casualties being reported. At 10:00 the next morning I left for a tour of the trenches

taking two trench stretchers with me, and going in by Via Gellia. I returned to Kemmel via Regent Street Dugouts and Lindenhoeck, because the road from Lindenhoeck to Kemmel could not be used by day in clear weather. Hence I followed a foot path through the fields and trees to the west of the road, passing on my way a farmhouse where the people were still in occupation. An abundance of ripe brambleberries were on the bushes along the path, and these I sampled freely. A few enemy shells were passing overhead towards our batteries.

The 4th Canadian Field Ambulance took over the duty of clearing our sick on this, the first day of October. At 9:15 the front line reported no casualties for the day, but that the enemy had exploded two small mines in front of our trenches. We were of the opinion that he had miscalculated the length of his tunnels, but had reason within a few days to revise this opinion.

There was considerable rifle and machine gun fire during the night but no resulting casualties. The enemy's overs came right into the village, but were fairly well spent at that range. At 9:30 a.m., October 2, I began my tour of the trenches, following the same route as the day before. I saw Macqualter at the dugouts where he had a man with a belly ache under observation and rest. The man was nearly ready to return to the line. At 1:30 p.m. I returned to Kemmel. During the afternoon I had a visit from the commanding officer of the 4th Field Ambulance and sent out one sick. Before midnight the sounds of heavy rifle fire came to us from the front.

The next morning, October 3, was cloudy with a northeast wind. At 8 a.m. a report came from the front line that Private I. L. Nuttall had been accidentally shot and killed in the trenches.³ This was our first casualty, and, occurring in the way it did, made us all feel rather gloomy. At 9 a.m. I went up Via Gellia to Beaver Hat. Here I met Captain Baker and Sergeant Alport of 6th Field Company of Engineers and proposed to them that they put the dugout in question into a fit condition for a Regimental Aid Post. It was small for the purpose, but its location close to the front made it otherwise suitable. At 11 a.m. one of our men reported with an accidental bayonet wound of the hand that required

3 Pte. Ino Lawrence Kennedy Nuttall, died of accidental injury, October 3, 1915, age 23. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 571. "A sniper-scope was being fixed to the rifle of Pte. I. L. Nuttall [*sic*] when the rifle accidentally discharged and the bullet penetrated his heart." Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 48.

two sutures. It began to seem that we were more dangerous to ourselves than to the enemy. At noon I visited Lindenhoeck where the 4th Field Ambulance had an Advanced Dressing Station manned with a squad of stretcher bearers. During the night they went up to Regent Street Dugouts and brought out a sick man for evacuation. In the afternoon our artillery was unusually busy.

October 4 was fair and bright at 7 a.m., but by 8:00 the rain was falling, and by 8:45 it was coming down heavily. I was called to see another Belgian child afflicted with croup. During the forenoon I had a visit from the Deputy Assistant Director of Medical Services. Later I paid a call to Beaver Hat to see if the dugout had been repaired but found nothing had been done. In the afternoon two enemy shells were fired into the village and our batteries responded vigorously. At 3:20 p.m. a German plane flew over Kemmel taking plenty of time for observation. It was hotly fired at by our "Archies," or anti-aircraft guns, but escaped unscathed. Between 5:30 and 6 p.m. we were heavily shelled with large calibre guns and fragments of the shells fell in the road before the Doctor's House. At 10:30 that night our first casualty from enemy action reported, with a fragment of bomb in his left thigh. Private D. Hinton's wound was not a serious one, but we sent him out to the field ambulance for a dose of A.T. or anti-tetanus serum. Noise of considerable bombing, probably from small trench mortar bombs, or sausages, as they were termed, came down to us during the night.

The morning of October 5 was wet. Between 9:45 and 1:45 I made my usual daily circle tour of the trench system. We had several casualties in the afternoon, three of whom came out by way of Via Gellia from the left flank sector, and one by way of Regent Street Dugouts to Lindenhoeck where he was picked up by the motor ambulance. Among the former, Sgt.-Major Burberry, had two shell wounds of the right side, in one of which the fragments were still buried. I enlarged the wound and removed the piece of shell with a rag of clothing. The three casualties, all of whom had been well dressed by the company stretcher bearers, were evacuated to the 4th Field Ambulance. N. G. Lowe who was brought out from the right flank through Lindenhoeck had severe shell wounds of the face and arms.⁴ He had been given half a grain of morphine by A. E. Brown of B Company, and was comfortable when he went out. However

4 The injury was caused by a whiz-bang that exploded above his head as it passed over his dugout. Roy, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 36.

the poor fellow was completely blinded by his injuries. I heard afterwards that he went to the Sir Arthur Pearson School for the Blind.⁵

The day following, October 6, was our last for this first tour of trench duty. The night had been quiet, and the morning was dark but not cold. When night came the 28th Battalion began the relief. Our post was relieved at 9:30 and we sent our medical equipment to Locre by the Maltese cart. At 11 p.m. the battalion marched out of Kemmel for Locre. Our horses had been brought down for us by the transport, and the mounted officers rode in the column. I do not think I was ever out of doors on such a dark night. Even the horse I was riding stumbled in the holes on the road. We reached Locre half an hour after midnight and took over our billets.

The following morning I had a big sick parade as was nearly always the case after a relief. I evacuated several sick to the 6th Field Ambulance, stationed in Locre, and sent one to Captain Cameron, the dental officer of this unit, for treatment. The camp was in a dirty and untidy state, but a fatigue party was set to work cleaning up. The men were housed in miserable dark damp huts.

The day of October 7 passed uneventfully, but at 7:15 p.m. sounds of heavy cannonading from the front announced that something was amiss, and orders came through for the battalion to stand to. The Germans had sprung a mine under the G trenches, blowing up a number of the 28th Battalion holding the position. It was directly opposite this point that the two small mines had been exploded in No Man's Land a few days before, when our battalion was in the line. This earlier action had evidently been a ruse to throw us off our guard. A working party of the 31st Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Forster was close by and gave assistance in clearing out the wounded.

The Germans did not attack but scourged the place with machine gun fire and trench mortar bombs. Among the wounded was the very popular engineer officer, Captain Baker, who had both eyes destroyed by a bullet across the face. He was brought out from under fire by Lieutenant Forster, who gave us the bad news when he returned to Locre the next

5 Otherwise known as St. Dunstan's, it was a hospital for blinded soldiers established in 1915 by the blind newspaper magnet, Sir Arthur Pearson, at his Regent Park London home. There the soldiers were taught trades and crafts under the direction of instructors who were themselves sightless. *The Times History and Encyclopaedia of the War* (Printing House Square, London E.C.: The Times Publishing Company, 1917), Part 166, Vol. 13, Oct. 23, 359.

MCGILL TO FRANCES MCGILL, 10 OCTOBER 1915. HAROLD COMMENTED ON THE TOUR OF DUTY:

Oct. 10, 1915:

Dear Frances;-
I do not think I have had a letter from you since we landed in France, but I sent you one from one of our camps. Do not be surprised if you do not hear from me for considerable periods of time for our way of life here is irregular in the extreme. Just at present we are taking things rather easy in reserve billets after a touch of duty in the trenches lasting six days. We came off pretty lucky in regard to casualties although the enemy's shelling was quite vigorous at times. Our artillery however was always ready to give Fritz a little of his own back. It is strange what a difference the sound of artillery firing has on one's nerves depending upon whether it is our own or the enemy's. It sounds fine to hear our own shells tearing over our heads but when

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the German big fellows come wailing across the effect is distinctly disquieting. The Germans repeatedly shell the village in which we had our headquarters while in the trenches but seldom do much damage. The sound of an exploding Jack Johnson is something terrific and jars you from the feet up, i.e. of course if it is fairly close. A piece of a Jack Johnson casing fell beside me on the road the other evening but I cannot honestly say I have had any narrow escapes so far.

I have been up to the fire trenches a number of times but ~~am not~~ do not make my headquarters there when the Battalion is in. My Reg. Aid Post is back near Br. Pdz. in an abandoned house. The furnishings in the house had been very fine but all the windows had been shot out so we had some difficulty in keeping warm. It poured rain almost incessantly while

our battalion was holding the trenches but the weather has been much dryer and better since we came into reserve billets. The trenches are just what I expected to see, judging from pictures and descriptions. After the first day one feels perfectly at home in them. Our boys behaved splendidly and under shell fire acted like old campaigners.

The peasants around here are now busy digging their potatoes and vegetables. I rode over ~~the~~ to an adjoining village where D.W. Hds. are located yesterday and saw numbers of women and children working in the fields. The country is wonderfully well tilled and they seem to get fine crops. It is wonderful how these people stick to their ruined houses in the villages. Down behind the firing line there is hardly a pane of glass left in ~~any~~ any of the houses yet the inhabitants continue dwelling there.

I am brother Harold McMill

morning. The crater was afterwards known as the “Glory Hole,” the name being perpetuated by succeeding units.

Our term of six days in reserve passed away quickly enough, although, so far as the men were concerned I believe they preferred, at this time, the tour in the trenches. The reason for this I shall explain later. For the date of October 12, I have a note in my diary that the first case of “Nerves” appeared on sick parade. This condition was afterwards euphemistically described as shell-shock.⁶ I dare say that the fact of our being under orders to take over the front line again that night helped to precipitate his attack. At 7:15 p.m. I took over the Regimental Aid Post at the Château barrier in Kemmel.

I have mentioned the fact that a sentry was posted at this barrier during daylight to divert foot traffic from the street through the woods to avoid exposure on the corner. This sentry stood directly in front of the window of the house used as our aid post, and I was occasionally entertained during idle moments by seeing and hearing him in action. During our first tour of duty I was looking out of the window on the day following the appearance of the German plane and the subsequent shelling of the village. A solitary soldier walking down the street was promptly halted by the sentry and told to go through the shelter of the trees. The soldier, to whom the route was evidently new, demurred and wished to know the reason for the extraordinary order that the guard was enforcing. The sentry very patiently explained that the road at the corner was in view of the enemy and that any sign of life there might draw fire. The traveller was still unconvinced; did not believe that he would be in sight at the corner; and even if he was, the appearance of

6 One of the first observations made early in the war was that liability to shell shock or to nervous injury varied among individuals but most had been exposed to the effects of high explosive shells. *The Times History and Encyclopaedia of the War*, Part 87, Vol. 7, April 18, 1916, 315. P B:— Initially, “shell shock” literally meant a breakdown directly associated with a specific incident in action, quite often a severe shelling, hence the name. “Neurasthenia,” referred to the more commonly observed breakdown resulting from the cumulative exposure to the stress of combat. Both were manifestations of post-traumatic stress disorder, though the psychiatric explanation of these forms of breakdown was hardly understood by contemporaries. “Shell shock” later came to be applied universally to all such conditions, regardless of cause. The majority of medical officers, and senior officers in general, tended to dismiss most of the cases of neurasthenia as malingering and evidence of cowardice. Canadian sentiments followed British. For a good study of the problem, see Ben Shepard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), Chapters 1–12.

one man would make no difference. At this the sentry waxed eloquent. Standing at ease and holding his rifle with one hand, he waved the other in the air and delivered himself as follows:

“Now what’s the bloody use of you talking to me like that? Yesterday, when that plane was overhead all the damned fools in town rushed into the streets and showed themselves. That’s why we got shelled in the evening. What’s the — use of issuing —ing orders to save our lives and then — on this way.”

This concluded the argument, and without another word the obstructed one turned to his left and disappeared among the trees.

This was to be a memorable tour for us, for we were under orders to make a demonstration with the aid of the artillery at 2 p.m. the first day in, October 13, in the form of a smoke screen to simulate a gas attack. The object was to assist an operation of the British who were making an attack farther south, at Loos, in the direction of Arras in an area of entrenched ground called the Labyrinth, and which the 31st Battalion occupied in later years. The firing was very quiet throughout the night. At 6 a.m. the next morning the sky was cloudy and the wind southwest. An hour later the rain began to fall. I began my round of the trenches at 9 a.m. Our guns opened a heavy bombardment at the set hour of 2 p.m. Soon reports of casualties began to come in from the front line and later, walking wounded arrived. One of them, George Price, had shell wounds of the face and hands, the right eye and the left thumb being destroyed.

C Company was holding the F trenches on the high ground at the right of our position directly in front of Regent Street Dugouts. It should have been a good and comparatively safe position, but the trenches had been so badly sited that it was a veritable trap. The fire trenches were on the forward slope of this secondary ridge, while the support and shelter trenches, instead of being placed on the reverse slope above Regent Street Dugouts, were along the exact crest of the high ground. The result was that every enemy shell that missed the front line bunged right into our supports. There were also a number of short crisscross trenches here, called feather trenches.

When the enemy counter-bombardment came back shortly after 2 p.m. in response to our simulated gas attack, the greater portion of the garrison was very properly drawn out of the front line and placed for supposed safety in these shelter trenches. The front line, held by machine gunners and thinly manned posts, became an outpost line. The result was unexpected and resulted in severe casualties for us. The

enemy seemed thoroughly alarmed at our demonstration and opened a furious artillery fire all along our front. The thinly held front line of fire trench on the forward slope came off comparatively lucky, while the support line farther back on the crown of the high ground was torn to pieces with disastrous results to the occupants. Both the shells fired at this position and the overs, missing the front line, hit these supports.

At 5:30 p.m. a report came in from C Company that they had four men killed and several wounded. Willis, my medical orderly, left for Regent Street Dugouts where several wounded were reported to be. By 6:30 all the wounded reported as coming out by Via Gellia had passed through our Regimental Aid Post. I sent another stretcher by the water cart to Regent Street, and an hour later I also started for that point, taking our surgical haversack with me. The night was very dark; the artillery fire had ceased, but plenty of bullets were coming over.

I reached the dugouts and reported to Major Hewgill who was in immediate command in this advanced position. From him I learned that Lieutenant Tofft had been killed while helping to dig out some of his platoon that had been buried in the trench by a shell explosion.⁷ Tofft must have been the victim of a direct hit, or almost such, for he had been literally blown to pieces. The poor old fellow had taken his severe casualties of the afternoon much to heart, and was crying as he worked frantically to rescue the buried wounded. Thus he met his end. Several of these wounded had been brought into the Regent Street Dugouts where I attended them. One of them presented a shocking appearance. He must have been very close to the shell burst. He had no open wound, but the force of the explosion had driven the soft mud under his eyelids with such pressure that both upper and lower lids were ballooned out and the eyeballs encased in tightly packed mud. Fortunately the eyes were not injured other than from the irritation. I spent considerable time in everting the lids and clearing out the impacted mud. The man's name was Connon.

At 10:30 p.m. I left for the trenches where most of the damage had been done. Here I saw Private Flemming, who had a fracture of the right arm and was bleeding freely. I redressed his wound, applied splints and gave him half a grain of morphine. After I had attended the wounded

7 The same shell burst killed five other ranks: Cpl. Thomas Henderson, Pte. Louis Eric Callaghan, Pte. Stanley Sheridan, Pte. Findlay D. McInnes, and Pte. Arthur John Groves. Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 52.

still in the trenches I visited Major Doughty's dugout where I had a drink of rum which I felt I needed and deserved. I then returned to Regent Street and walked back to Kemmel overland with Lieutenant Hughes of the Engineers. This officer was one of great promise, but was killed by a shell in Kemmel village a few days later.⁸ He was a nephew of Major-General Sir Sam Hughes. At 1:30 a.m. October 14, I reached our Regimental Aid Post in Kemmel.

As was usual the day after an action, I saw several wounded on October 14 who had not reported the day before. These were cases of shock and concussion, some of them with ruptured ear drums, the result of having been close to the detonation of a high explosive shell. This little action cost us in casualties one officer and nine men killed, and 22 N.C.O.s and men wounded, very much too expensive for the class of operation it was. I have in my diary a list of the wounded I attended and descriptions of the wounds.⁹ Later in the war under similar circumstances when we held our front with machine guns our losses were trifling.¹⁰

At 7 a.m. on the morning of October 15 rain was falling. No casualties had reported during the night but we attended a few during the day. One of them had a bullet wound of the left foot accidentally sustained while he was cleaning his rifle. Later on wounds of this character were regarded with grave suspicion and were termed S.I.W. or self-inflicted wounds.¹¹ I think that in this case the wound was genuinely accidental,

8 Lieut. James Chester Hughes, 6th Field Company, Canadian Engineers, was killed in action, November 15, 1915, at age 27. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 357.

9 Personal Diary entry, Oct. 13, 1915: Pte. A. Guthrie, s. w. below left ear; Pte. J. A. Bell, scalp wound; Pte. T. M. Cole eyes; Pte. L. L. Elmore w. left forearm; L/Cpl. A. Myler, wound of face; Pte. R. Preston, sh. w. head; Pte. F. L. Connor, eyes; Pte. W. F. Hoad, sprained ankle; Pte. W. H. Goucher, knee injured; Pte. B. Radford, injured clavicle; Pte. R. Calvert, sh. left arm; Sgt. W. Townsend, sh. w. leg and hands; Pte. W. A. Fleming, gunshot fracture; Pte. W. March, injured eyes; Sgt. J. Dunne, scalp wound. Personal Diary entry, Oct. 14, 1915: Pte. E. Griffith, bronchitis; Cpl. J. Horton, shrapnel wounds of leg & back; Pte. C. F. Vigar, shrapnel wounds of right thigh; Pte. S. E. Etheridge injured back; Cpl. J. Ritchie shrapnel wound of groin; Pte. W. J. McMaster, concussion & shock; Pte. I. Mclean, ruptured ear drum & concussion; Pte. Smith, suffering from concussion.

10 British practice, which the Canadians followed, called for the forward trench lines to be held in strength in order to resist a German attack. The result when these trenches were shelled was predictably costly to the defenders. Later in the war the forward line was held by a thin screen of soldiers, mostly machine gunners, with the bulk of the troops stationed further back. — P B.

11 Deemed an act of cowardice and a court martial offence.

although I remember I gave the matter much consideration at the time. At 6:15 in the evening Corporal Fraser of C Company was killed, and three machine gun men wounded, all with one rifle grenade.¹²

The morning of October 16 was misty, which made overland travelling out of the trenches comparatively safe. At 10 a.m. Lieut.-Col. Bell and I left together for a tour of the trenches. We went up Suicide Road, past a ruined farmhouse and outbuildings known as Ration Farm. We found everything satisfactory in the trenches. Private Given, C.A.M.C., stationed at Regent Street where he had relieved Macqualter, reported that three wounded men had gone out during the night via Lindenhoeck, all in good shape. At 1:45 that afternoon we returned from the trenches by Via Gellia. Within 45 minutes I had a phone message from Major D. S. McKay of the 27th Battalion that a man with an abdominal wound was in E 2 trench, and with a request that I go up to see him. This is an example that even among senior officers the civilian ideas of the duties of a medical officer still prevailed to an extent. In civilian life when a person is injured the first impulse of his companions, and the one acted upon, is to send for a doctor. Soldiers soon overcome this tendency and come to realize that if the M.O. is required to run here and there over great distances to attend casualties, his time will be spent in travelling and his work will be largely ineffective. Hence I did not go up to E 2 but relayed the message on to Captain Hank Anderson of the 4th Field Ambulance who was at Lindenhoeck.

During the evening two men paraded sick complaining of earache. I have a note in my diary to the effect that complaints of concussion, shock and earache were becoming rather too common. However, one apparently genuine case of nerves did show up. His cousin had been wounded and his two pals killed beside him on October 13. I allowed this man to go back to the horse lines to do light duty¹³ until the battalion was relieved and with the intention of noting the result. At 6:30

12 Cpl. Alexander Paul Fraser was twenty-four years of age. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 254. P B:— A rifle grenade was basically a standard Mills bomb (or hand grenade), which could be fired from a rifle using a blank cartridge. It provided a very effective trench weapon, performing much like a short-range, small-calibre mortar.

13 “Light duty” was a frequently employed treatment for so-called “deserving cases” of battle stress/shell shock. Anything that removed the tension of combat, even briefly, helped all but the worst cases. Being kept close to their comrades aided in the steady-ing of such men, as did the fact that there was no stigma of malingering attached to such light duty assignments close to the front. — P B.

Captain Bell of the 4th Field Ambulance called at the Regimental Aid Post.

The morning of October 17 was also misty, firing was quiet, and overland travelling comparatively safe. I have neglected to explain that we had a number of fortified machine gun posts or strong points, as they were termed, as a reserve line of defence. One of these, S.P. 11, was at the orchard where the Beaver Hat dugout was located on Via Gellia in the area of dead ground previously described. Another, S.P. 10, was placed some few hundred yards to the right between there and Regent Street Dugouts. It was well sited on high ground with an excellent field of fire and concealed by a grove of trees. Forward of this machine gun post were several vantage points where our snipers could lie concealed in the growth of chicory behind and above our trenches and watch for signs of life in the enemy position. This was a favourite hunting ground for Roy, one of our most deadly marksmen. Lieutenant Jewitt told me of an experience he had with Roy when he accompanied him on a sniping expedition. Jewitt was watching the German lines through a powerful glass when suddenly the head of a fresh-faced German appeared above the parapet. Jewitt said that as Roy pressed the trigger he could see the bullet hole in the forehead of the victim.¹⁴

I began my tour of the trenches at 10:30 a.m. and travelled most of the way overland. I went in by Ration Farm, visited S.P. 10 on my way to Regent Street, and from there on to E 2 Trench where I paid a visit to Major McLeod of the 27th Battalion. After going through our own trench system as far back as S.P. 11, I left and cut across the fields to Ration Farm. This appeared a logical route for bringing out wounded at night or in misty weather. During the afternoon I had a call from Captain Cartwright of the 4th Field Ambulance, and saw a sick child of seven years in Kemmel village. The next day was uneventful, and we were relieved at night by the 28th Battalion. We took quarters again at Kemmel shelters where new tents had been pitched.

The morning of October 19 was bright and clear. The men were permitted to sleep until late and had their breakfast at 9:30. The sick parade was smaller than one might expect after such a hard tour of duty in the

14 Sniping was endemic on the Western Front, making any activity in the open extremely dangerous to unwary or uninitiated troops. Sniping and random shelling were the principal causes of "wastage" (casualties) in so-called "quiet" areas of the front line. — P B.

trenches. At 2 p.m. I had a talk with the stretcher bearers on the lessons that we might learn from our recent experience.

On the afternoon of October 20, I called upon the Assistant Director of Medical Services at Westoutre and discussed the question of moving our Regimental Aid Post up to Regent Street Dugouts to be nearer the firing line. The whole question was one of whether or not the 4th Field Ambulance could clear the post. The battalion wheeled transport went in that far at night, and I could not see why the horse ambulance wagons could not do as much, thus saving a long carry back to Lindenhoeck. Colonel Fotheringham, agreed to examine the ground with me the following day, and we made an appointment to meet in Kemmel. The next morning I had a visit from the Divisional Sanitary Officer who detained me for such a long time that I was late for my appointment with the Colonel in Kemmel. I caught up with him in Lindenhoeck and listened to a lecture on the evils of unpunctuality in general and with particular reference to army conditions. We decided to carry out our survey and inspection of the terrain the following day, October 22.

The next morning at 9:15 a party of us met in Kemmel; Colonel Fotheringham, Assistant Director of Medical Services, Lieut.-Col. Jacques, Deputy Assistant Director, Lieut.-Col. Webster, Commanding Officer of the 4th Field Ambulance, Captain C. Cullum, Medical Officer of the 28th Battalion, and myself. We made an inspection tour of the terrain with special reference to available roads and communication trenches. Our object was to select sites suitable for an aid post and to determine routes by which motor ambulance cars might approach nearer the firing line. V.C. and Suicide Roads seemed fairly safe. We decided upon Regent Street Dugouts as the proper location to have a medical officer stationed for the unit holding the F and G trenches. An auxiliary post seemed indicated at S.P. 11 or Beaver Hat. The question as to the time when our plans should be carried out was left open.

During the afternoon of this day I rode into Bailleul and heard a lecture from Sir Anthony Bowlby at No. 8 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on "Results of Early Operation in Gunshot Wounds." The medical officers present were told that we must disregard the lessons of the South African War, especially in respect to perforating abdominal wounds. The reason given was that in South Africa the fighting took place on clean ground, while the soil of Belgium was heavily contaminated and practically all wounds were primarily infected. Hence operative treatment was indicated. It had been found in the South African

War that the wounds did better if left alone. When I returned to billets from Bailleul I found Lieut.-Col. Bell ill with a temperature of 101.2.

The next day, Saturday, October 23, was quite chilly and presented a foretaste of winter. During the afternoon I visited the brigade transport lines. The Commanding Officer was ill all day with a temperature of 102. In the evening I had him admitted to the 6th Field Ambulance rest station in the hospice or convent half-a-mile east of Locre. The following day we were to take over the trenches from the 28th Battalion. In the forenoon I called on Captain Cullum at the Regimental Aid Post in Kemmel where I found that the 4th Field Ambulance had not yet taken over the post.

At 7:30 the next morning, October 25, there was a cold driving rain with a high wind. Three hours later, Major Hewgill and I started out on a round of the trenches and found the fire trenches very muddy. In the afternoon I saw a three-year-old child ill with bronchitis, also another civilian, a man, with an infected hand. No casualties were reported during the day.

The following morning was bright and clear with a high wind. I paid a visit to the sick child near the Lindenhoeck road and at 10:30 started my daily tour of the trenches. These were much drier than on the previous day and the men in consequence much happier. Our artillery was registering and the enemy replying on our trenches. Between 1 p.m. and 1:30 p.m. the village of Kemmel was bombarded with large calibre high explosive shells. A few buildings were knocked down. The regimental sergeant major of the 29th Battalion sustained a compound fracture of the right leg, and I dressed him and also a girl with a scalp wound.¹⁵ Several casualties passed through during the afternoon, and in the evening I again visited the sick child near Lindenhoeck road. I found her considerably improved. At night Colonel Webster and I went in to Regent Street, taking in a horse-drawn ambulance wagon. We concluded that it was too heavy for the work of clearing this post.

15 McGill to Frances McGill, October 29, 1915. "A little Belgian girl was brought to me with a bad scalp wound caused either by a fragment of shell or a brick. She was a plucky little thing and stood the pain of suturing well. She first said she thought soldiers 'No good' but after I had her head dressed she shook hands with me and assured me that soldiers were all right. I do not wonder that some of these poor devils have a low estimate of the military profession."

Wednesday, October 27, was a miserable day, rainy and cold. We had no casualties during the night, but during the day I sent out a number of sick. In the evening a man reported in a state of nervous collapse and confessed that he could not bear the shell fire. I advised that he be employed behind the lines for a time. Rain continued the following day. At noon a civilian woman reported to have a sliver removed from her finger. On Friday I sent out a few sick and paid a visit to a sick woman on a farm on the Lindenhoek road.

I do not recall that she dwelt on the same farm with the savage dog that I had encountered earlier on one of my daily circle tours of the trench system, but presume that she did. I have no record of the date, but when I was passing the farm located west of the Lindenhoek-Kemmel road I had a little adventure that serves to show the attitude of some of the civilian inhabitants towards the troops. The farmhouse had a yard enclosed by a fence of high stout palings. On the day in question as I approached the yard, on my way past I noticed a huge ferocious-looking dog loose in the yard. This animal evidently resented my presence, for he was making a tremendous uproar and striving frantically to get at me by climbing over or through the palings. His manner was decidedly hostile; and his appearance altogether terrifying. The people of the house were all gathered at the back door thoroughly enjoying my alarm. As my path ran within a few feet of the fence I was really afraid that the brute might escape and attack me. Therefore I loosened the flap of my pistol holster and drew my 45 Colt automatic, having decided to empty it into the dog as soon as he got partly through the fence.

Then the wind *did* change. The hilarity of the onlookers subsided in an instant, and there was a wild scramble to secure and chain the dog. There is no doubt but that these people were evilly disposed towards us;¹⁶ yet here they were allowed to remain a few yards from a road within rifle shot of the German line, and along which a brigade had marched in close column of route a few nights before. No wonder that we were regaled daily with the most plausible and circumstantial stories of espionage. Most of them, I must say, were manufactured out of whole cloth without a shred of evidence in support. Nevertheless the circumstances were such as to give a reasonable basis for such stories and suspicions.

16 McGill, an obviously honourable man, seems not to have appreciated the frequency with which soldiers looted such farms for food and firewood, or the army simply expropriated their property for military use. – P B.

And speaking of dogs reminds me that I cannot recall ever having seen a pet dog in Belgian Flanders. All were of the large and powerful breed such as I have described, and were used as draught and work animals. A dog that couldn't pull his weight and a little better in the economic scheme did not survive in this part of the country. Most people find a large savage dog a most disturbing alarming beast to encounter. I suppose that it is an instinct that survives from the terror formerly inspired by wolves. Anyway, I found the possession of a large calibre automatic was a comfort on this occasion.

Saturday, October 30, the day of our relief, began with a bright morning. There were no further casualties. I left for my usual trench tour at 9:45. Our airplanes were taking advantage of the clear morning, and were in the air in force. The Boches¹⁷ were shooting hundreds of anti-aircraft shells at them with no apparent effect. The men were in good spirits despite the dampness and mud. Even a brief sight and feel of the sun has a wonderfully reviving effect. No wonder that luminary is an object of worship on the part of so many savage peoples. The battalion was relieved at night and we went into billets just before midnight.

17 "Boche" – of French origin – was one of the British army's slang terms for the German soldier. Others were "Hun," "Fritz," and "Heinie."

IX OUR ENEMY THE MUD

The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year,
Of wailing winds, and naked woods, and meadows brown and sere.

– William Cullen Bryant, *The Death of the Flowers*

Monday was the 1st of November and opened with a dull, cloudy and threatening sky. The melancholy days had come, and for weeks to come the men were to realize the full significance of this designation. During our just completed period of duty in the trenches we had had a foretaste of what was in store for us.

Rain poured steadily all day and continued throughout the following night during which the unit furnished a working party of 400 men for the forward area. At the 7:30 a.m. sick parade the next morning the stretcher bearers reported that the men who had been out all night on fatigue duty were now too tired to get up and had not yet received their breakfast. We postponed sick parade until 10 a.m., and had 47 report at that hour, most of them suffering from bronchitis and severe colds. I sent four of them to the 6th Field Ambulance. In the afternoon I saw a supplementary parade of five.

On the next day, November 3, there were 68 on sick parade. The sky was still cloudy but the rain had ceased. For this date I have the following entry in my diary:

400 men go out on working party to trenches every night. Become soaked to waists. No place to dry clothes. Huts are unheated. Sick parade will grow steadily unless these conditions are remedied.

Later I arranged an interview with the Brigade Commanding Officer and made appropriate representations to him. In the afternoon the sun made a few feeble attempts to shine, but by 9:00 in the evening rain was falling again. Private Duff and Private Dawson of our machine gun section were seriously wounded during the day by a shell in Kemmel when they were returning to the trenches from pay parade. I have not explained that we were so short of machine guns at this date that the battalion

machine gun sections were obliged to serve in the support positions continuously while their units were out of the line. At 7:30 p.m. Captain Brothers gave a lecture on hand grenades at Locre Hospice.

The sky cleared in the forenoon of November 4 and the next day was fine. For this day I have the following note in my diary:

A number of men are reporting with worn-out and defective boots. Company officers say they cannot get a new issue. If boots are not available I see no other course than to send the men to hospital, as otherwise they will soon become ineffective from trench feet.

In the afternoon the unit began to move forward by platoons to relieve the 28th Battalion in the trenches. At 6:30 I reached our old aid post in Kemmel and found that it had been taken over by the 4th Field Ambulance. I proceeded to Regent Street Dugouts whence the Regimental Aid Post had been transferred. The Maltese cart came down with our supplies in spite of the bad roads. After the relief was completed we had a man in the G Trench shot through the thigh and calf. He was taken out overland as the communication trenches were impassable. By this time the dugout at Beaver Hat had been made habitable, and I sent Private Given there, to take care of casualties coming from our left flank.

There was a heavy frost on the morning of Saturday, November 6. In the forenoon I crossed overland to Beaver Hat and saw Private Given who was now in charge of our post there. The little dugout was in good shape, but the work had been done by the engineers attached to the 5th Brigade. Given had scarcely taken possession the evening before, when the premises were claimed by someone from the 5th Brigade, who protested quite properly that their men had done the work. Given, however, had the right of prior occupancy and present possession, and location, as the dugout was on the 6th Brigade side of the trench. He stoutly and successfully maintained his claim and position.

The ground was in a muddy and filthy condition everywhere. The walls of the trenches were simply disintegrating. Dugouts were falling in. Hard work, with the help of sandbags and timber, kept the front line in a tolerable condition, but the communication trenches were almost wholly impassable. Practically all ingress and egress to the front trenches had to be by overland routes, and the enemy snipers were not slow to take advantage of this state of affairs. B Company had an unnecessary casualty this morning. A man going up from the rear overland to the trench occupied by his company reached his destination safely. Then,

instead of at once jumping into the trench, he, for some unaccountable reason, stood upright on the parados, or rear wall of the trench, and took a leisurely look about him. In the split second of his delay a German sniper got him through the heart, and he fell dead, head foremost, into the trench.

The next day, November 7, was a Sunday, and the misty morning made overland travelling reasonably safe. At 11 a.m. I left for my round of the trenches and crossed over to see Given. As the Via Gellia from S.P. 11 to the front line was completely blocked I was compelled to follow the route taken by the unfortunate man the previous day. The mist was now lifting, and I wasted no time getting into G 3 Trench. As it was now noon, I accepted an invitation from Major Doughty to have lunch with him and his officers. They had taken advantage of the mist to gather some turnips in No Man's Land and promised an excellent lunch. The lunch was all that was promised, but just as we were finishing the Boches shelled the section of the trench heavily with high explosive rounds. One man was killed and two were wounded. I remained to give personal attention to the wounded, one of whom had a broken collar bone. After I put up the fracture I laid him on the fire step of the trench close to the parapet in as safe a position as it was possible for one to find, for the dugouts were only surface ones and worse than useless as a protection against heavy shells.

The man was hysterical, and believed himself deaf and unable to hear what was said to him. Nevertheless he could hear the scream of an approaching shell, and as each one came down it was pitiable to watch his agitation and distress. He seemed to be trying to crawl in between the sandbags. He was a brave soldier too, but it must be a harrowing experience indeed to lie helpless in a trench with shells bursting in all directions. The unwounded went about their business as though nothing out of the way was going on. I decided that the two wounded must be left in the trench until dark when they could be carried out overland. When the bombardment died down I went on through the trenches, visited Major Dawson and found that he had lost two men in the little show; one killed and one wounded. By the time I got back to Regent Street our guns were busy in a retaliation bombardment. Lieutenant Pinkham went out that evening ill with bronchitis.

Monday morning was bright and clear, altogether too clear for walking overland. Sergeant Brighty of the scouts was reported wounded while patrolling No Man's Land in the night, shot through the thigh with a rifle or machine gun bullet. At 11 a.m. I started for S.P. 11. The enemy

was sweeping the rear areas with machine gun fire, and bullets were coming too fast for safety, so I allowed discretion rather than valour to determine the balance of my itinerary. Instead of going to S.P. 11, I turned to the left and went down to Battalion Headquarters in Kemmel. There I visited the field ambulance Advanced Dressing Station located in our abandoned aid post and found that our wounded of the day before had passed through during the night. I had lunch at headquarters and returned to Regent Street in the afternoon. Artillery on both sides was busy until evening but there were no resulting casualties on our side. We could only hope that the enemy was not so lucky.

The next morning was clear with a high warm south wind blowing. We felt that the conditions foreboded more rain, and we were not mistaken. By nine the sky was becoming beclouded and the artillery was beginning to talk. At eleven I crossed over to see Given and found him quite comfortable. A heavy artillery bombardment continued from both sides throughout the day, but again we were fortunate in having no casualties.

In the evening, after dark, Lieutenant Tucker paid a visit to the dugout which I shared with Major Hewgill. We all partook of medical comforts together for the purpose of drinking to our own healths and to the success of British arms. Rain was pouring outside, but our little dugout was still dry, and inside with our primus stove going and the candles lit, the place was comfortable and almost homelike. Little incidents like that of Tucker's visit stand out with startling clearness after the lapse of so many years. An hour of good fellowship did much to make us forget, for the time being, the squalor and dreariness of our surroundings and duties. If I ever return to Belgium I shall go up the Suicide Road from Lindenhoeck and try to locate the site of the old dugout where Major Hewgill and I had our quarters during the first part of November, 1915.

Godeau, my batman, was a Belgian by birth and took great pains in his attempts to teach us French. I remember he endeavoured to instruct us in the most polite terms to employ when inviting a friend to join us in a drink.¹ Major Hewgill invariably gave an equivocal reception to an invitation to partake of alcoholic refreshment. He would demur at first,

1 Following British army tradition, the Canadians had ready access to the rum issue, both officers and men. The ranks had a daily ration, usually in the early morning, ostensibly "to take the edge off the night's cold." The ration was doubled if an attack was in the offing. No one should underestimate the number of men whose nerves were calmed down by that welcome dose of "liquid courage." — P B.

arguing the pros and cons, while carefully marshalling all the reasons for and against his indulging in such a relaxation. He maintained a stern and unbiased neutrality during the debate, but I must say that the verdict usually went to the affirmative by the slightest shade of a narrow margin.

November 10, the morning after Tucker's visit, was bright and clear, but showers of rain fell during the day; and in the evening we had a thunderstorm, an unusual event so late in the season. One walking wounded, Private Freer, came out during the day with shell wounds of the left elbow and wrist. The next morning was cold and clear. I sent out Private A. R. Kerr with shell wounds of the back and shoulders. While I was on my daily round of our positions a group of wounded from the 27th Battalion arrived at the dugout. These I attended upon my return to Regent Street. At night we were relieved by the 28th Battalion. I sent out the medical equipment in a limber that had brought down rations, and walked back to Kemmel via S.P. 10 with Major Hewgill. Our battalion reached Kemmel Shelters in a pouring rain at 10 p.m. Several large huts were being erected there to serve as winter quarters.

Two days of heavy driving rain with high winds followed our relief. The sanitary state of our camp was kept in better shape than one had a right to expect, considering the weather conditions. I was called to the Lord Strathcona's Horse billets on the afternoon of November 13 to see a sick man whom I sent to the 6th Field Ambulance. On November 15 I visited the Assistant Director of Medical Services at Westoutre and on my way called upon Captain Cameron, the dental officer of the 6th Field Ambulance. I was unfortunate enough to require his services but fortunate enough to find him available. A root abscess that was forming gave me so much pain on the following day that I again called upon Captain Cameron at the Locre Hospice and had him open the abscess, with great consequent relief.

During the evening of November 17 we relieved the 28th Battalion once again. I sent my medical supplies in by a ration limber, and arrived at Regent Street, at 9:30 p.m. The sky had cleared, and it was a bright, moonlit night with a heavy white frost. At midnight a message came in reporting two casualties from D Company in G 3 Trench, and to the effect that they were being taken out overland. Major Hewgill and I started out towards S.P. 11 to intercept the stretcher parties on their way out. We soon met the carrying parties and found that one of the wounded, Sergeant Macbeth, had died on the way. Macbeth had come from Lethbridge and was an exceptionally fine soldier.

I shall never forget the incident of our meeting the two stretchers bearing the by-products of war. An almost full moon rode high in the cloudless sky. The grass and the upper crust of mud were frozen stiff, making a crunching sound as we moved. Otherwise the silence was broken only by the crackle of rifle fire, and as a background of the scene the German Very lights, or flares, shot up into the clear air. The men set the stretchers on the ground as we approached, and stood about in perfect silence as I examined the casualties. Macbeth, as I have stated, was already dead and his open eyes in a deathly white face were turned in a fixed stare upward to the sky. All around the white frost glistened in the moonlight.²

Corporal Davidson was the other casualty. We went on down into Kemmel with the carrying parties where I redressed Davidson's wounds. We got back to Regent Street at 3:30 in the morning. At 8 a.m. the sky was clear but at 9:00 the rain was falling. Three hours later I visited Given at Beaver Hat. There was considerable artillery firing in the afternoon but no resulting casualties. Rain continued until 10 p.m. when the sky cleared. The next morning, November 19, was misty with a heavy frost. The weather was turning colder, but we rather welcomed this change as a possible relief from the intolerable mud. One casualty was reported from C Company during the night. I sent out several sick during the day.

The two following days passed without casualties. On November 21 I visited the fire trenches and returned across country. This was the last day of our front line tour of duty as the period had been shortened to four days on account of the weather and abominable ground conditions.

2 The December 3rd *Lethbridge Daily Herald* front page tribute captioned "Fred Macbeth, Lethbridge Born Boy, Gives Life for Empire at Front in France," began, "A native-born product, leaving his home to serve his country, Fred Macbeth's death brings home to us all more strikingly than any other local fatality, since the war started, the real meaning of war and our part in it. Fred was known to nearly every person in the city. He was a member of a highly-esteemed local family. Educated in our schools, associated with our athletic organizations, – in fact, active in all the affairs of young men in the city, Fred Macbeth was liked and admired by everybody. He answered the call of country eagerly. In his regiment he made good and was quickly promoted. He crossed the seas, trained in England, and then went into the trenches. A German bullet has killed him, but he meets the death of a patriot. He dies for his country, – more than that, he dies for the cause of freedom, for the salvation of the world from autocracy and militarism. He will sleep in a hero's grave, loved and revered by hundreds of his fellow citizens. We hope that his death at the hands of the enemy will inspire his chums to join the ranks and serve their country."

After dark we were relieved by the 28th Battalion, and by 9 p.m. were once more back in Locre.

I have described weather conditions and our daily doings in detail, hoping to be able to give a picture of our routine way of life – and death. No wonder weather has become firmly established as a never failing topic of conversation. Under any conditions approaching the primitive, the state of the weather and the climatic features become of tremendous importance in affecting the well being and comfort of those exposed to an outdoor life. But no amount of description or recounting of incidents can convey an adequate idea of the dreary wretchedness to which the troops were now exposed.

A constant and unrelenting dampness seemed to pervade our whole environment, indoors and out. Rain fell the greater part of the time. Fields became sodden. The sides of trenches and dugouts seemed to disintegrate. When off the surfaced roads one sank to the ankle, or knee, or hip, depending upon the extent to which the soil had been disturbed. Even the paved roads were constantly covered with a coating of thin slithery mud tracked on from the sides, and of about the consistency of pea soup. The soil appeared semi-soluble. The mud was not sticky but I think that we should have been more satisfied if it had been, for then we could have derived some conception of substance and solidarity. And added to all this was the circumstance of a large amount of wheeled traffic on the roads, splashing all and sundry with the filthy mess. During the last two tours the dugouts and the trenches were continuously crumbling and dissolving. In many places the communication trenches were wholly impassable; and at other points one had to wade to the hips to effect a passage. The only creatures that seemed to thrive were the rats, and our trenches swarmed with these loathsome obscene vermin. Later we had gas warfare to thank for one compensating advantage; the rats were exterminated.

“Our armies swore terribly in Flanders,” said Uncle Toby. Laurence Sterne’s hero was speaking of a time 200 years before the Great War. Before actual experience of the place I used to think that this failing probably was due to the natural innate depravity of the soldiers in the armies of that period. Now I felt that I knew the reason of the transgression mentioned by Uncle Toby; it was without doubt the mud.

In the warfare of the earlier days the earth was not so churned up with shell fire as our surroundings were, and conditions were probably not so bad as we encountered. However, human nature is always the same, and like conditions produce like effects. I do not think that I ever

before heard such a display of weird, picturesque and wholehearted profanity as when a working party was making its way up a stretch of muddy and caved-in trench, or when a limber passed at a trot along the road plastering everybody within range.

Nevertheless the sun did shine at times, although never for long enough to dry the mud, and when we were in brigade reserve at Locre we had short periods of comfort and even pleasure. The occasional battalion concert at night helped the men to endure the everlasting dullness, dirt and danger. I remember that at one of these concerts about this time Sandy Clifton, who had recently arrived in a reinforcement draft, made the hit of the evening by his rendering of that soul stirring song "Tickler's Jam."³ From then to the end of the war Sandy and "Tickler's Jam" were inseparably associated.

The Belgian village of Locre possessed one invaluable advantage as a billeting area. Situated on the lower ground a short distance on the Kemmel side of the village was the Locre Hospice or Convent. I do not yet know exactly what the nature of the institution was but think it was a girls' orphanage school. It was operated by the Roman Catholic Sisters, and stood out in the somewhat squalid surroundings as a model of order, cleanliness and comfort. The Mother Superior in charge was a woman of exceptional intelligence and force of character. Her personality was reflected in the fine condition and operation of the activity under her direction and care. It appealed to us as an oasis in a wilderness of mud and filth. The buildings were of red brick and were enclosed by a high brick wall, leaving a courtyard of generous dimensions entered by a gateway closed by large iron gates. The 6th Field Ambulance was established here where it had taken over some of the buildings as a Divisional Rest Station (D.R.S.). The activities of the Hospice which went forward in the remaining space seemed to be of varied nature. I have said that the main purpose appeared to be that of a girls' orphanage, but the subsidiary functions were of much greater importance to the troops. One could buy an excellent meal there, and obtain the best of wines, all the way from vin ordinaire to the finest of champagne. Baths were also

3 Tune – 'Any Old Iron:'

Tickler's jam, how I love Tickler's Jam.

Plum and apple in a one-pound pot,

Sent from Blighty in a ten-ton lot.

Every night when I'm asleep I'm dreaming that I am

Forcing my way through the Dardanelles with a ton of Tickler's jam.

available to the officers for a small fee, and these luxuries with hot and cold running water were an unspeakable comfort after a tour of duty in the trenches when we did not remove our clothes for days at a time. Large quantities of lace were made and sold. Much of the fine Belgian lace sent home as presents at this period was made here, produced by the Sisters and girls of the Locre Hospice.

During one of our periods in brigade reserve at Locre the battalion officers held a dinner to celebrate the first anniversary of our mobilization. We held the affair in the Hospice, and we all made a most enjoyable occasion of it. It was the first time we had had an opportunity of all dining together since the unit left England. The Hospice did an excellent business in the sale of champagne that evening. It is strange that I have no record whatever of this important event in my war diary; yet I am certain that it occurred. It is remarkable how the idea one has of the relative importance of events changes. At the time I thought it all important to keep a record of casualties and sick, and all my experiences of an official nature, but I neglected to jot down notes of many little inconsequential happenings that I would give a good deal to be able to recall now. Two years later I visited the Locre Hospice again when our division was returning from the Passchendaele campaign, and had a good meal there. In the following spring the place was totally destroyed in the last frantic German drive for the Channel ports.

Occasionally, when the unit was at Locre, I would get out my horse and ride over the Belgian-French border into Bailleul. At this time when a mounted officer appeared on the streets of Bailleul he was at once surrounded by a crowd of street gamins all eager for the job of holding the horse. One of these boys would hold a horse patiently all afternoon for a few sous. Later on the practice was stopped by army order, for there were instances of the horse going off with the diminutive groom still clinging to the bridle and being dragged about the streets.

Our four days of reserve duty were up on November 25 and we prepared to relieve the 28th Battalion once more. The morning was fine but rain had set in by the time of our move in the evening. I sent two stretchers in to S.P. 10 by a ration limber and I went up with the Maltese cart to Ration Farm on the V.C. Road, accompanied by Corporal Bright. A shifting of our battalion front to the left, ordered for the next day, made a change in medical arrangements necessary. This move made Regent Street and Pall Mall useless as a channel for sending out the wounded. All must come down to Kemmel by way of Via Gellia or overland. I decided to make the little dugout at Beaver Hat our Regimental Aid

Post. The distance from Ration Farm at the road side to this point was too far for us to pack our full equipment and the transport could not approach nearer with any degree of safety. Bright and I picked out the instruments and supplies that were urgently necessary. The balance of our medical supplies and equipment we cached in the ruined house and carried what we needed forward to the new aid post. Here we relieved Given who left for Kemmel at 9 p.m.

We soon established ourselves in the new quarters. These were small for three of us, Bright, Willis, and myself, but were dry and comfortable. No sooner were we settled than I discovered that my watch was missing from the strap on my wrist. I decided that it must have fallen out of the strap while we were sorting our impedimenta at Ration Farm. Bright volunteered to go back and have a look for it. The night was black and I had very little hope of Bright's success as he started off. He returned in a short time, and to my intense surprise handed me back my watch, which I am still wearing. How he managed to find it in the dark is more than I can guess.

The platoons moved in overland, and A Company sustained two casualties from rifle fire. Rogers and Dunstall each received a bullet through a forearm, not dangerous wounds. The next day was partially cloudy with passing squalls of snow, the air being very clear in intervals between snowstorms. Kemmel was shelled with high explosive at noon. After dark the night was clear and frosty. The Battalion took over new frontage.

The next morning was misty with a northeast wind. The direction of the wind was of vital importance to us when we were in the trenches. A southwest wind usually brought rain, while a wind from the east involved the danger of an enemy gas attack.⁴

At four in the afternoon of November 27 I went up to G 3 Trench to see Private Collins who had been shot through the head with a rifle bullet. Brain substance protruded through the wound of exit in the left temple, and the whole right side of the body was paralyzed. I redressed the wound and gave him half a grain of morphine. Although unconscious he tore frantically at the dressings with his left hand. I prevented

4 At this time, German gas was still discharged directly into the air from storage cylinders near the front line to be blown by the wind. Later it was delivered by gas-filled shells fired by ordinary artillery pieces. No longer being wind-dependent, gas attacks could then occur at any time. — P B.

this by placing his unparalyzed arm on a straight splint. The severity of his wound made it scarcely worthwhile to remove him from the trench, but this was necessary because of the bad effect his presence would have on the garrison. I sent him out to the 4th Field Ambulance.⁵ The obsessing fear of the men was death from hemorrhage, and the skill developed by the stretcher bearers in controlling this danger did much to allay the perfectly justifiable apprehension.

It may be well for me to explain here that the term "stretcher bearer" was a misnomer. These were well-trained dressers or first aid men. They were not sent as members of carrying parties taking out the wounded: they were too valuable in the firing line to be detailed for this duty. Sometimes one of them went out with a severely wounded man, but in the capacity of a first aid man and not as one of the carrying squad. These splendid fellows soon inspired both officers and men with the utmost confidence, and this confidence was well and worthily placed. In my three years experience with combatant troops I never knew one of them to fail in his duty, nor did I ever meet one reporting with shell shock. This immunity to shell-shock or "nerves" I attribute to two factors. The first was the high quality of the men picked for the job; and the second was the fact that stretcher bearers were kept busy attending to others when a unit was exposed to severe shelling in a static position, the most fruitful occasion for the development of this complaint. They had no time to give consideration to their own danger even had they been so inclined. They bore the highly honourable designation of the "Suicide Club."

Our weather during this tour was a mixture of rain, clear weather and hard frosts. Artillery on both sides was busy most of the time. During the evening of November 29 we were relieved by the 28th Battalion in a heavy rain storm and went back to Kemmel Shelters. No straw or fuel had been provided for the men's huts. Rain was almost continuous for the four days we were out of the trenches.

By 6:15 p.m., December 3, we were back again in our little dugout at Beaver Hat near S.P. 11. At 4:30 the following afternoon Corporal Haslam and Private Wishart of the signalling section were badly wounded while crossing the piece of chicory field where the communication trench was blocked near the front line. Corporal Haslam had a

5 Pte. Edward Charles Collins died of wounds, November 30, 1915. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 145.

badly fractured skull and died in the aid post.⁶ Wishart was shot through the thigh. The sciatic nerve must have been involved, for he complained of intense pain in the foot where there was no wound. I afterwards visited Wishart in a London hospital and found that it had been necessary for the surgeons to amputate the limb above the knee. The day following, Private Toyne was shot through the right forearm while crossing the same fatal open space that had brought disaster to the two signallers the previous day. In the evening our nine-point-two howitzers⁷ shelled the enemy trenches in front of us with good effect.

December 6 was a clear sunny day and quite warm for the season. The men's feet were constantly wet, but I had yet to see a case of "Trench foot."⁸ The morning of December 7 was also clear, and the enemy took advantage of the occasion to break shrapnel over our roads. We had one casualty as the result. Rain came on in the afternoon. A few heavy high explosive shells fell near our dugout but did no harm other than extinguishing our candles. The night was very dark, wet and windy. The next day was uneventful except for heavy artillery fire in the direction of Ypres and lively rifle and machine gun fire on the 5th Brigade front to our left. We were relieved by the 28th Battalion on the night of December 9 and moved back to Locre.

The following day we had a serious accident in Locre. One of the men, cleaning his rifle in a hut, accidentally discharged the weapon and shot Private I. Dobson through the thigh. The bone was shattered and the victim badly shocked. The fracture was put up by Corporal Teddy Barnes and the casualty admitted to No. 6 Field Ambulance. The officers of the ambulance complimented me on the fine manner in which the fracture had been treated, and I was able to tell them that all the credit was due to Corporal Barnes who had done all the work himself. Dobson afterwards died at Bailleul Clearing Station.⁹ He was an excellent soldier, and his unnecessary death cast a gloom over the unit, especially felt by his own company, D.

6 Cpl. John Marven Haslam was shot by a sniper. Roy, *Journal of Private Fraser*, 65.

7 Howitzers of 9.2-inch calibre.

8 "Trench foot" – a serious contributor to "wastage" early in the war – was caused by a fungal infection. Men with wet feet were particularly vulnerable. Great pains were taken to keep soldiers' feet dry, and feet were constantly inspected and treated with oil. Normal trench conditions rendered the men very vulnerable to this malady which, in extreme cases, could lead to amputation. – P B.

9 Pte. Ingram Dobson died of accidental wounds, December 12, 1915. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 198.

I paid a visit to Col. Fotheringham at Westoutre on December 12 and later admitted Lieutenant Forster to the 6th Field Ambulance. On the day following, I inspected a reinforcement draft just arrived from England. In the afternoon of December 14, I admitted Major Dawson of B Company to the ambulance. On the 15th we again relieved the 28th Battalion in the line having reverted to the six-day tour of duty. I had dinner at the Battalion Headquarters mess in Kemmel, and later went up to the Regimental Aid Post with two of the battalion scouts. I reached my destination at 10 p.m. and found the orderlies in possession with the supplies.

During this period our divisional engineers had been busy to good purpose. Besides doing much to maintain and keep open our communication trenches, they had completed a couple of pieces of work of special immediate interest to my orderlies and myself. The first and most important was the construction of a light railway from S.P. 11 to Ration Farm, whereby we could bring in supplies and take out stretcher wounded. The other was a new dugout with two bunks, upper and lower, to serve as living quarters for the medical officer and another officer. I think Major Piper was the first to share these new quarters with me. This new dugout improved the Regimental Aid Post very much. It was not shell-proof but it afforded shelter from the weather and left more space in the other dugout.

On December 17, I had my first casualty among the stretcher bearers. Private Forster was shot through the chest. We sent him out over the newly constructed light railway. He had a large gaping wound and I entertained little hope of his recovery. As a matter of fact, the first news we had of him was the report of his death.¹⁰

Rifle fire was much more brisk the following day, December 18, and our casualties were two killed and two wounded. For this date I have the following in my diary:

A large number of men are going sick, all with practically the same symptoms; viz., temperature 100–103, severe bronchitis; sore throat; fauces much injected; uvula swollen, glistening and edematous; also headache and general malaise. I diagnose these cases as bronchitis or influenza according to whether bronchial or constitutional symptoms predominate.

10 Pte. William Forster, killed in action, December 26, 1915, age 22. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 249.

These patients also complained bitterly of atrocious pains in the bones and muscles, especially in the shins. I may be pardoned for failing to make an exact diagnosis at this period of the war, for the malady with which I was dealing was a new and then unknown disease. The illness was the infection later known as trench fever. This was thoroughly studied before the end of the war and the nature and cause determined. The fact was established that the infection was conveyed by body lice.

As darkness came on the wind switched to the northeast, the gas danger direction. Rifle and machine gun fire increased in volume. At 4:30 the next morning, long before daylight, the sounds of a heavy bombardment came from our left front in the direction of Ypres. At 8:00 in the morning the bombardment was still in full volume, but did not seem to be working down the line in our direction. The morning was bright with a light northeast wind. We began to notice traces of irritating gas in the air, and our eyes burned and smarted as from wood smoke. Symptoms were not severe but the men put on their eye shields which furnished ample protection. This was our first experience with enemy gas.¹¹

Although the thunderous bombardment continued to our left until well into the forenoon we suffered no effects or retaliation other than the gas mentioned. The small birds such as sparrows seemed more distressed than usual during the uproar of the artillery, and I noticed some of them endeavouring to obtain shelter within the crevices between the sandbags. Perhaps the gas affected them. After 9:30 the bombardment began to die down although a considerable exchange of courtesies continued all day. Meanwhile a freshening breeze dissipated the gas.

The morning of December 20 was misty with a light rain falling. A mild west wind relieved our anxiety in respect to further gas attacks but artillery fire was still active on our left front. In the course of the day a stray field artillery shell hit S.P. 10, the strong point I mentioned as an element in our second line of defence. It was well sited and well concealed. Hitherto the garrison had been unmolested, but this single unlucky hit resulted in two casualties, one killed and one wounded. The 28th Battalion relieved us on December 21 and we went back to Kemmel Shelters, reaching our quarters in the midst of a pouring rain. The

11 An adequate gas mask was still not available to British or Canadian troops at this time. This deficiency was not satisfactorily addressed until September 1916 with the introduction of the British-designed small-box respirator (SBR). – P B.

weather, although wet and miserable, was not cold at this time. We were gradually bringing our trench system into an improved state, and settling down to a more or less regular routine. So far as the medical section was concerned we ceased to carry in and change our medical supplies with each relief. We established a small stock of drugs and dressings at the Regimental Aid Post. These we kept replenished by indents on the field ambulance clearing our post. The permanent stock was given and taken over by the units carrying out the reliefs. The medical officer's orderlies attended to this detail. We retained possession of our own instruments, taking these in and out.

With the possible exception of one day, rain fell almost continuously for the six days we were out of the line. On December 24, the day before Christmas, Captain Myatt, the adjutant, Captain Westmore and I paid a visit to Westoutre. After I met with our Assistant Director of Medical Services, Colonel Fotheringham, the three of us had lunch at the mess of the 4th Field Ambulance. During the afternoon we paid a call at Mont Noir, where a divisional rest station for officers was situated. One or two 31st Battalion officers were among the patients. We returned to Kemmel Shelters in the dusk of our first Christmas Eve in the war zone.

The unit did not indulge in any special Christmas festivities. I cannot recall that there was any special ration either in the men's or officers' messes to celebrate the occasion. My only distinct recollection of the time is that Major Hewgill bet me a case of Scotch that the war would be over before another Christmas season came. Needless to say, I won this bet by an ample margin. Three more Christmas dinners I was to eat upon army rations, the third and last in a German schloss beyond the Rhine. The Christmas of 1915 was probably the most gloomy of them all. Our billets were cheerless, the weather was vile, and to make matters worse, there was a lot of sickness in the unit.¹²

In the evening of December 27 we moved into the trenches for our last turn in the Old Year, a tour destined to be severe and costly as to casualties. I stopped for my dinner at the Battalion Headquarters mess in Kemmel on my way to the trenches. As I walked up the Via Gellia towards the aid post between eight and nine o'clock I could hear trench mortar bombs exploding in our G 2 trenches. The enemy was developing this type of warfare, and until a few weeks later we had no ade-

12 Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 63, cites bronchitis, pneumonia, trench foot, and influenza.

quate means of reprisal. At midnight I attended four wounded from this strafe,¹³ two of our own 31st men, one sapper¹⁴ and one trench mortar man. Sergeant Kemp and Private Pearce of D Company were killed.¹⁵

December 28 was fine and clear. As evening advanced into night the air was very still, and sounds behind both our own and the German lines could be heard miles away with startling distinctness. As I stood out beside the trench I could distinguish the sounds of wheeled transport on the roads, the barking of dogs, and even the voices of men coming from great distances. The guns were almost silent. I am able to recall the incident because of its rarity in the midst of the long periods of unbroken turmoil and uproar of war.

When I got out of my bunk at 7:30 the next morning the enemy was again busy throwing trench torpedoes into our line. In the afternoon Lieut.-Col. Webster of the 4th Field Ambulance called at my dugout, and together we visited the front line. The situation was quite peaceful when we reached there. We worked our way down the fire trench to the right until we reached the section occupied by A Company. Rifle and artillery fire were almost absent, but as we stood talking to Captain MacPherson the Hun started in again on his accursed trench mortar work. It all began very quietly. As we stood talking we heard a faint “pop” over in the German trenches. MacPherson was instantly on the alert.

“Look out,” he said, “there’s a trench torpedo coming.”

We looked in the direction indicated, and presently made out a small black object high in the air, and travelling towards our line in a sharp trajectory curve. At first it looked rather small and inoffensive, but as it descended in its course towards us its apparent bulk rapidly increased and we caught the menacing sound of its hurtling roar. As the descent progressed we could form an idea of where it would strike, a point well to our left. There was no need for us to move, so we stood and watched it detonate with a shattering explosion. It struck outside the trench and did no particular damage. Soon we heard the warning pop again, and another slug shot into the air. The men in the open trench towards which it was directed had plenty of time to give it a wide berth, and no casualties resulted.

13 British army slang for a bombardment.

14 British army slang for an engineer.

15 Sgt. Alfred James Kemp, killed in action, December 27, 1915, age 36. Pte. Russell S. Pearce, died of wounds, December 27, 1915. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 393 & 594.

The third shot was the unlucky one for us. To the left of where we were standing our front line trench had originally run through farm buildings, all visible traces of which had been erased by shell fire. However, a portion of the old farmhouse basement, a concrete and brick structure, remained as an underground shelter connected with our fire trench. At the moment it was occupied by ten men of the machine gun section. I saw the torpedo, or trench mortar bomb, strike this point and made my way along the trench to the scene of the damage. The shelter was completely wrecked and all of the men buried in the debris which contained sections of concrete weighing hundreds of pounds.

Naturally there was a little confusion, but order was being restored quickly and the work of digging out the buried casualties proceeded with. A telephone call for artillery retaliation was sent back. The section of the trench wall involved was blown to pieces. One of the garrison showed slight signs of panic, and it was a pleasure and inspiration to see his sergeant, Percy Boulden, handle the situation. With the utmost nonchalance and in quiet even tones he spoke to the excited soldier, assured him there was no danger and that it was not necessary for him to crouch behind the demolished parapet. His attitude of quiet confidence soon engendered perfect tranquillity among the members of his section. Boulden was in the right business as a soldier. Still in my mind's eye I can see him, standing calmly looking over the edge of the broken-down trench wall and giving a quick turn of his head from time to time towards the men under his immediate command. He was afterwards wounded and returned just in time to meet his death in our second action on the Somme the following September.¹⁶

In the meantime, a rescue party under the direction of Lieutenant White were busy digging out the dead and wounded. I gave what help I could and attended to the stricken men as they were rescued. Our guns had responded promptly, and a stream of eighteen-pound shells¹⁷ were passing close over our heads and bursting in the German line less than 100 yards away. The setting sun showed blood red for a few minutes from under the edge of the cloud that had covered the sky all day. Some of the wounded had been released, but further rescue measures were impeded by a huge section of concrete that the men could not raise by

16 Sgt. Percy Boulden, killed in action, September 24, 1916, age 28. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 72.

17 The standard British field artillery piece was called an "eighteen pounder," after the approximate weight of the shell. This was considered light artillery. – P B.

hand. A large piece of timber was obtained to use as a pry or crowbar, but the trench was so narrow that proper leverage was prevented. It was then that White did something that for sheer stark courage equalled anything I saw in my whole war experience. He climbed up on the paradox with the timber and found that from that position he could pry up the block of concrete. There he stood, perfectly still between the setting sun and the Germans, a fair mark for a sniper if ever there was one. Whether the Germans were all keeping their heads down on account of our shell fire or because some feeling of chivalry on their part restrained them from shooting, I shall never know.

Anyway White was not even shot at, and he continued to hold up the concrete by the use of his lever until all the casualties had been removed. By this time it was black dark. Two of the men had been killed outright and one was mortally wounded. This latter I had laid to one side, and told the stretcher parties not to bother taking him out of the trench as their services could be utilized to better advantage in removing those that had a chance. My orders were misunderstood, and while I was busy with other wounded the man was placed on a stretcher and taken down to the Regimental Aid Post where he died. One of the men instantly killed was Beach, a fine boy from Medicine Hat, and upon whom I had operated in the Holy Cross Hospital the previous winter.¹⁸ By 10:30 that night I had evacuated the last of the wounded over the light railway to Ration Farm where a motor ambulance picked them up.

I think that this was the most concentrated punishment we ever sustained from enemy trench mortars, although at times the bombardment was much heavier and continued longer than on this occasion. Up to this time our own trench mortar equipment was inadequate for proper retaliation. Soon after we were supplied with the famous Stokes gun,¹⁹ and from then on were able to send as good as we received or perhaps a little better. During this winter one of our men had a harrowing experience in a trench mortar bombardment. The first bomb that exploded buried him in earth up to the neck but without injuring him otherwise. When in this position, unable to move an inch, he saw and heard

18 Pte. Oliver Massey Beach, died of wounds, December 31, 1915, age 28. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 42.

19 The standard British trench mortar from 1916 onward. It was manufactured in various calibres from 2-inches up. — P B.

another coming. This second missile struck within a few feet of his head but failed to explode.

The day following the events just recorded was quiet and we had no casualties, either sick or wounded. The succeeding day was December 31, the last of the old year. During the night our front line was heavily bombed with trench mortars but nobody was hit. It was an artillery day and both sides maintained a vigorous exchange all afternoon. Two of the enemy heavies struck close enough to our dugout to extinguish our candles. The enemy artillery fire died down at night, but our guns all fired a salvo at midnight to announce the birth of the New Year.

X THE DAWN OF A NEW YEAR

Now the New Year reviving old desires
The thoughtful soul to solitude retires.

– Edward Fitzgerald, *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*

During the course of New Year's Day, Major-General Turner, later Sir Richard Turner, our divisional General Officer Commanding, called at the dugout to wish me compliments of the season. In the afternoon the enemy again scourged our front line with trench mortars and shelled our supports heavily with high explosive.¹ Our guns replied with spirit, and if they inflicted any damage to life it was all to the good, for we escaped having any casualties.

General Turner's good wishes may have had some virtue, for after the New Year our luck seemed to change for the better. Sickness diminished greatly in the battalion, and for two consecutive tours of duty we did not have a single casualty. When we were in the midst of the second tour Colonel Depree, our G.S.O. 1,² thrust his head into my dugout one morning and enquired how things were going with the unit. When I told him that we were doing our second tour without a casualty, he solemnly touched the wooden frame of the dugout entrance. His action also may have had an effect. Even the weather seemed to relent somewhat. Although there was still considerable rain, the temperature was extraordinarily high for the season.

January 19 was a particularly fine bright day. We were in Kemmel Shelters, so I took advantage of the clear air to pay a visit to one of the artillery observation posts on Mont Kemmel. These lookout spots were

1 "High Explosive," or H.E., destroyed by pure explosive concussion. The alternative was shrapnel, which spread jagged shards of metal or metal spheres (the grapeshot of earlier wars) in the direction of the shell's motion when it exploded above the ground. Shrapnel was used exclusively as an anti-personnel weapon and to shatter barbed wire. – P B.

2 General Staff Officer, the primary staff officer of a division.

known as O.P.s or, in the vernacular, Oh Pips.³ Although I remained in the observation post for a considerable time and searched the enemy back country carefully through powerful glasses I was not rewarded by the sight of a single Hun.

On the night of January 28–29 a working party of 500 men was formed from the battalion to bury⁴ a heavy telephone cable behind the Brigade front between Kemmel and the line. I went with them and attended a couple of casualties caused by stray bullets. On the evening of February 1 we relieved the 28th Battalion. There was much rifle and machine gun fire during the night but we sustained no casualties. In fact, during the six-day tour of duty we had a few wounded but no one killed.

The only exciting incident in which I was involved occurred on the last day but one of the tour. As the P.P.C.L.I. of the 3rd Canadian Division was to relieve us on this occasion I was under the necessity of having all of our stretchers and medical equipment taken out with us. With this purpose in mind I went up to the front line in the afternoon to give the stretcher bearers the necessary directions. Our heavy artillery had been harsh with Fritz all day, and at the time I went up, 3 p.m., were pounding him unmercifully. I heard afterwards that the show had been put on for the edification of some big-wig from England. At any rate, our gunners must have struck a target with sensitive nerves, for just after I got into the front line the enemy came back with everything he had, trench mortar bombs, field artillery and heavy high explosive.

I went to C Company dugout and found Captain Tucker trying to get Battalion Headquarters on the phone to ask for our field artillery to come into action.

“Cannot get on now, Sir,” said the signaller, “there is a message coming in.”

When the message was finally fully received and deciphered it proved to be a request for some trivial return. The situation made me think of the episode depicted in one of Bairnsfather’s drawings in which the commanding officer is shown in the midst of a bombardment receiving an order to give an account of the number of tins of raspberry jam consumed by his troops.

3 Contemporary British army code words for letters of the alphabet included “Oh” for “O” and “Pip” for “P.” – P B.

4 Telephone cables buried a metre or more underground were less prone to be cut by German shelling. – P B.

BAIRNSFATHER'S DRAWING:

"The Things that Matter.
 Scene: Loos, during the
 September offensive.
 Colonel Fitz-Shrapnel
 receives the following
 message from 'G.H.Q.':
 – 'Please let us know,
 as soon as possible,
 the number of tins of raspberry
 jam issued to you last
 Friday.'"



By this time the junction of the communication trench with the front line was completely blocked, and much as I desired to make a hasty retirement to the Regimental Aid Post that course of action was not possible at the moment. My line of retreat was cut off, and the only thing left for me to do was to stick it out until the bombardment was over.

In a case like this one might just as well disregard the enemy shells – he could not dodge them anyway – except for the trench mortar bombs. It was worth one's while to keep a sharp lookout for these for if the footing was good and no obstructions were in the way, anybody but a cripple had a good chance to avoid the points where the bombs struck and exploded. The fire trench was being battered in at different places,

MCGILL TO EMMA GRIFFIS, 5 FEBRUARY 1916. HAROLD ANSWERED EMMA'S QUERIES RELATING TO TRENCH DUTY AND ARMY RATIONS, AND GAVE NEWS OF MUTUAL ACQUAINTANCES NOW OVERSEAS.

Feb 5/1916.

Dear Miss Griffis,
Your very interesting letter of Jan 2 came to hand some days ago which we were out in divisional reserve. In your letter you asked a number of questions which I shall try to answer before my superfluous paper runs out. Usually my stationary is a field message book but for very special correspondence with particular people I use envelopes & paper that came in a Christmas box. However - to get on with my answers. I may be counted on for giving you this information but shall risk being sent home. We do six day shifts in the trenches. During that time we sleep in our clothes and in the fire trenches the men are not allowed to take off their boots except to change socks. At the end of the six days we move out to billets just behind the firing line and are then what is known as brigade reserve. At the end of six days we again relieve in the trenches and after another tour of duty go back to divisional reserve.

The divisional divisional reserve billets are pretty well out of the shelled area and everybody feels pretty safe there besides the women have practically no fatigues to do and get rested up a bit. After a dump in divisional reserve the whole program begins again.

No, I have never seen Mrs Bailey over here but saw Mrs Gardner several times in England. I heard that she went to the Mediterranean but no late news of her. I believe that the nurses that went to the Mediterranean had a pretty hard time of it and that several died. My sister is still at No 2 Canadian General Hospital, France and expects to go over to England on leave about Feb 18. I am trying to arrange mine to begin on that date and if I can manage to make it we shall meet at the Cecil Hotel London. You may be sure that I am eagerly looking forward to the rendezvous for we have not yet been able to see each other since coming to the war. I have not missed a day from duty for 13 months. We are allowed eight

days leave from Boulogne to Boulogne and a day extra of one's destination is the South of Scotland. I think I shall declare myself from the Shetland Islands and try to work an extra day in London.

You ask about our rations and I must say they are very good. I do not think that ever before an army has been fed like this one. Now and then of course there will be a shortage in certain articles but on the whole very little complaint is heard. When the battalion is in the trenches my two orderlies and I have our rations come together and one of these orderlies does the cooking. About the only extra I buy is oatmeal to make porridge in the evenings. In the way of luxuries we get a ^{small} ration of rum apiece when in the trenches. In addition to my duties as M.B. I help to issue the rum. Each company issues its own rum, but some of the extra detachments such as bombers, snipers, signallers, M. Gun men, and wiremen get their rum at the

dressing room dugout. My corporal mess-
wres it out in a teapot. The wiremen
I mention are the chaps that go out
between our own and the German
trenches at night repairing old and
erecting new barbed wire defences.
They sometimes work within a few
yards of the German parapet and
are certainly entitled to get a drink
of rum when they come in.

I saw for the first time a real live
Hun a few days ago. He was a
prisoner who had been just ^{been} brought
in wounded. The other two battalions
of our brigade who occupied the trenches
at the time made a raid into Fritz's
lines and captured four prisoners
besides doing a lot of damage. Un-
~~fortunatley~~ unfortunately one of the
prisoners was killed by the German
fire when the party was coming back.
The German I saw was in a Field
Ambulance and had received a
bayonet thrust to make him come
along with his captors. He was a big
fine looking chap and very capable
looking. He had the rank of sergeant

and wore the ³⁻iron cross with two bars. He was a Russian and had been here only a few days, having come from the Russian front. Capt. Selby called to see us last Sunday and said that it was his intention to pay us another visit this week while we were in the trenches. I was expecting him to day but he did not show up. I was just as well pleased he did not come as it was a rather lively day for shoving visitors the trenches. Our artillery started it at noon and there was a fairly steady exchange of "Iron Rations" until dark. We did not have anyone hit although one of our trench kitchens was blown all to bits. The aeroplanes were quite busy and we saw one fight right over our heads. Our biplane was chasing a German and had a m. gun turned on him. We were disappointed in seeing the Hun escape to his own lines.

From Calgary papers that have just come to hand you must have been led to believe that we had been roughing it up with Fritz in capital shape. The whole story was a pure hoax and somebody should be put in jail for that sort of thing. Just let me thank you for your many kind offers of assistance and also for the papers and magazines which are much appreciated. Goodbye

Sincerely yours
Harold Rossell

P.S. That bowl was fine.
Humes

adding to the confusion of one executing rapid movements. At a spot where our line ran across a piece of low ground there was the beginning of a sap a few yards behind the trench. This was the beginning of one of the galleries that eventually led to mines placed under the Spanbroekmolen, a strongly fortified defence point in the German line on Messines Ridge. These were among the mines exploded under the German line on the morning of the great attack on Messines Ridge a year and a half later.

This sap looked very inviting to me. I jumped over the parapots and made my way to the mouth of the gallery. Here I was in a position of comparative safety, and was able to sit and watch the show out. I saw a large number of bombs curve over and explode, but was always in a position to take refuge in the sap if I saw one about to strike close by. Finally the storm ceased. Our trenches had been thoroughly knocked about, but only two men had been hit, and these had very slight wounds from shell splinters. One of them was in the trench a short distance from where I was sitting. A piece of shell had shattered his pipe and torn it from his mouth. Another smaller splinter had cut his cheek. When the shelling ceased he came over carrying the pipe pieces in his hand and asked to have me put iodine on his wound. His only remark was, "This is the worst of buying cheap pipes."

The next day, February 7, we were relieved by the P.P.C.L.I. as per orders. The medical officer of the incoming unit took over from me at 7 p.m., and I arrived in Kemmel Shelters two hours later. The next morning there were few on sick parade and only one case for hospital. At 11 a.m. the unit began a march of a few miles to the north and west. We were on our way to what were called rest billets in the vicinity of Berthen and Boechepe, two villages located in the high hilly country just across the border in French Flanders. By 2:00 in the afternoon the battalion had been established in its new quarters. The billeting officer had provided me wretched quarters for a medical inspection room in an old shed, but within a few days I was able to obtain one for myself in a back kitchen of a farmhouse.

The French civilians among whom we were billeted seemed more kindly disposed towards us than were those with whom we had lived in Belgium. They belonged to the same Flemish race that inhabited the area across the border, but somehow they seemed different. For one thing they were imbued with a far stronger feeling of patriotism and sense of national consciousness.

We soon settled down in our new environment. From our vantage point of high ground we had a clear though distant view of the battlefield of the Ypres Salient spread out on the plains below us to the east. On February 12 there were signs of unusual activity and sounds of heavy cannonading from the direction of the front. We afterwards learned that the enemy had captured a certain position, known as the "International Trench" because of its having changed hands so often.

On this date we had a visit from Major-General Mercer, General Officer Commanding the 3rd Canadian Division. This was the only occasion when I had the privilege of meeting this fine soldier. He was killed in action the following June in the severe fighting that took place in the Ypres Salient during the early part of that month.⁵ Several days of snow and rain followed. Then, on February 19 I had the inestimable pleasure of beginning my first leave from the front, and indeed my first leave of any kind in nearly 14 months.

It is difficult for anyone except a soldier or ex-soldier to convey the intense joy and satisfaction experienced by those proceeding on leave. A witty English officer described war as being "damned dull, damned dirty and damned dangerous." With the two latter terms of the description the most uninformed will likely agree. However I have frequently felt that my hearers have suspected me of attempted humour when I made reference to the dullness of active military service. But in sober literal truth, the dreary monotony of war is among its most trying features. Of course there were periods of intense activity and excitement as in the event of a general action; but the wearying round of duties day after day, with its dirt, discomfort, noise and sights of blood and death gradually brought about that condition in a man so graphically described as being "fed up." Hence it was that the grant of a few days leave was welcomed so joyously as a blessed relief. Certainly the respite was but a temporary one, but the soldier soon learned to live for the day passing over his head, and until the week or ten days of precious leave had expired, no thought of the hour of return to duty was allowed to mar the enjoyment of the present.

5 Major General Malcolm Smith Mercer was killed in action, June 3, 1916, age 57. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 523. While inspecting the lines Major General Mercer was caught in an enemy barrage at the outset of the Battle of Mount Sorrel and mortally wounded while trying to escape it.

Captain Kennedy of the 6th Field Ambulance took over my duties. As the leave train left Bailleul for Boulogne in the early hours of the morning, it was necessary for me to leave my billet at 3 a.m. Leave trains did not travel at express speed, and it was nearly noon before I reached Boulogne and went aboard the leave boat. The Channel was rough and as passengers sat on deck we could watch our torpedo boat destroyer escort racing along abreast of us with the waves almost burying the craft from sight at times. I sat beside a subaltern on a deck seat watching the sea and exchanging an occasional remark. Something I said called for a reply and, none forthcoming, I turned my gaze from the sea to glance at my companion. To my utter astonishment he had silently and completely vanished. For a moment I felt alarmed in the face of such a sudden and mysterious disappearance, but on looking farther down along I discerned the complete explanation.

An officer of field rank,⁶ the Ship's Major, was making his way along the crowded deck with a book and pencil taking down the names of junior officers for assigned duty. It was the duty of these unfortunates to be responsible for the proper movements and conduct of a squad of "Other Ranks" proceeding on leave, to see that they boarded the proper train, etc. Naturally this was not a popular duty as the first wish of every one of us was to reach London by the most direct route possible. My chance acquaintance had sensed the danger from afar and was not dainty in his leave-taking. He simply bolted down into the bowels of the ship where he remained until the officer and gentleman with the pad and pencil had completed his fell work and had secured the requisite number of victims.

The sight of the Kentish hills behind Folkestone was a pleasant view as we approached the harbour. From the deck I could make out many landmarks that had been familiar to us the previous summer when we were in training. Soon after the ship docked I was on a train on my way to London and feeling quite content with the world and the war. Most of us in these early days took our leave tickets to Scotland, intending to go as far as we could. Usually, though, we did not get past London, and it was a stock question to ask the man returning from leave if the barrier was still closed. Shortly after dark the train reached London and I took a taxi to the Cecil Hotel.

6 Above Captain and below General.



CAPTAIN HAROLD MCGILL AND LIEUT. N/S MARGARET MCGILL. COURTESY OF LAURA MCNAB.

The complete contrast between the luxury of the hotel and the conditions under which I had been living for months past gave me a feeling of unbounded satisfaction. Soon I began to meet other Canadians whom I knew, also on leave, and the evening passed away pleasantly. I had arranged with my sister, Margaret, who was with the Canadian base hospital at Le Tréport to meet me in London as she had managed to get her leave for the same period. She had not arrived when I inquired for her at the hotel but she turned up within a day or two. When we met I had a little difficulty in establishing my identity. I had not seen her for a year and a half and since leaving Canada I had grown a mustache, according to army orders.

My sister and her friend, Miss Lynch, of the same unit in France, went on up to Scotland to spend a portion of their leave but I remained at the Cecil Hotel. The weather was of the usual variety to be expected in London at the season but I thoroughly enjoyed every hour of my leave. An old acquaintance, Dr. W. Good of Winnipeg, was also a guest at the hotel. He had been working with the French Red Cross, and we enjoyed

several conversations in which we exchanged accounts of our respective and varied experiences.

Major Mewburn, afterwards Colonel Mewburn, who was stationed at the Duchess of Connaught's Hospital at Clivedon near Taplow, came in during the week and entertained Dr. Good and me at lunch. Major Mewburn was much interested to hear all the particulars concerning the death of Sergeant Macbeth whom he had known in Lethbridge. I arranged with the Major to visit him at Clivedon which I did a few days later. In the meantime I frequented theatres and among other famous actors saw George Grossmith in "Tonight's the Night." When my sister returned from Scotland we took in one or two shows together. G. P. Huntley, whom I saw many years later in Calgary, was playing in one of them.

All things, good or bad, come to an end, and before long enough I was in a taxi on my way to Victoria Station. Miss Lynch and Margaret came to the station to see me off on the leave train. Many an able writer has described the scenes enacted at this station during the long years of the war, and I shall not attempt an amateur effort. The journey back to Flanders was dreary and tiresome. I landed at Bailleul at 3 a.m. on the cold snowy morning of February 28. Here I fell in with an officer of the 27th Battalion, also returning from leave. Together we searched the town in vain for a place to sleep. If my memory is correct I spent the balance of the night on the floor of the room used as the office of the town billeting officer. After daylight I hunted up the 3rd Field Ambulance, which was quartered in the town, and spent the time as a guest of their mess while I waited for some means of reaching my own unit.

I managed to get a telephone message through to my unit, and along in the afternoon the mess cart called for me. During the time of my leave the battalion had been moved back to the line and now occupied the section formerly held by the 5th Brigade, immediately to the left of where we had been throughout the winter. The Battalion Headquarters and the Regimental Aid Post were located together at a farm on the east side of the Kemmel-Ypres road. The driver and I left Bailleul in the cart, and late in the afternoon fell in with our transport and water carts moving up to our position. At 8 p.m. I rejoined my unit and Captain Kennedy took his departure. Fresh snow had fallen during the day and the sky was overcast.

On February 29 we had a man killed by a high explosive shell. Our "Heavies," heavy artillery, were quite active during the afternoon of

March 1. At 4:30 the next morning, all of the heavies in our rear area opened a concentrated bombardment upon the enemy to our left front, the shells passing diagonally over our heads. The 17th British Division was making an attack to recover the International Trench, lost two weeks before, and all the heavies behind our position were firing to a flank in preparation and support of the attack. Most of us turned out of our blankets to witness the show which was by far the most impressive and spectacular night bombardment I had seen up to that date. It reminded me of something I had once read in one of Shakespeare's plays of the heavens dripping fire. The sky was ablaze with the flashes of the guns and the uproar was deafening. At 5:15 a.m. the bombardment ceased abruptly which seemed to us an indication that the operation had been a success. This was indeed the case, for we heard later in the day that the old "International" had been recovered.

The little action of the 17th Division cost us three casualties, the men being wounded by shells fired in retaliation. The following morning was fine and clear, but in the afternoon snow set in and fell steadily and heavily all afternoon. That same night we were relieved by the Royal Canadian Regiment of the 3rd Division, and we marched back to billets in the vicinity of La Clytte.

This was a dirty march. The night was as dark as the proverbial wolf's mouth, and snow was falling fast with a northeast wind. Naturally, the roads were very bad. The storm continued for three days until the snow must have been nearly a foot deep on the level. We had reached our billets around 11 p.m. on the night of March 3 and A and B Companies moved on to billets in the Berthen area the next day. I can remember walking down to the village of La Clytte that day and passing a motor truck on its way to the front loaded with the huge shells for the 15-inch howitzers. We had heard some of this variety on their way to visit the German lines two days before. The day following, March 5, the remainder of the unit marched back to Berthen where we went into billets close to where we had been when I went on leave. I presume we had been taken to the line on account of the contemplated action of the 17th Division on March 2.

On my sick parade of March 8, I discovered that a member of one of the recently arrived reinforcing drafts who had gone sick with an infected bunion, was also partially deaf. I sent him back to the field ambulance with a note as to his condition of hearing. I dare say that he is one of the thousands of returned men who are now drawing pensions at

the expense of the overburdened taxpayer, and because of being medically unfit from the beginning never rendered their country one nickel's worth of service.⁷

We were not left long in our new location. On March 9, through deep snow and under a bright sun overhead, we marched back to our old divisional reserve billets at Locre. In spite of the large fall of snow, the clear sunlight gave a touch of spring to the air. However there was another storm the next day. I have a note in my diary of this date that I sent a sergeant with flat feet to the Assistant Director of Medical Services for disposal as P.B. These letters indicated "permanent base," but were given an entirely different and much less respectable interpretation by those who remained to carry on. Any comments I have made or may make regarding medically unfit men from reinforcing drafts have no bearing upon the case of this N.C.O. He was a fine soldier and had "done his bit" in spite of his handicap of flat feet. Hard marching was out of his line, but he was still capable of rendering valuable service as an instructor at the base.

We remained at Locre four days, during which period half of the battalion was inoculated with typhoid-paratyphoid vaccine at the rest station conducted by the 6th Field Ambulance in the Locre Hospice. Most of those inoculated were quite ill afterwards, but no permanent ill effects followed in any case. On March 13 we relieved the 28th Battalion in our old section of the line in front of Kemmel and resumed our former routine. The tour was an uneventful one. The snow was melting; definite signs of spring were in evidence; and the bright sun had a cheering and heartening effect. Casualties were not severe, consisting of two men wounded by the premature explosion of a rifle grenade and a man shot through the leg by a rifle bullet while he was walking on Suicide Road. On March 19 we moved back to Kemmel Shelters.

On March 21 I inspected a draft of 49 men sent to us as reinforcements. Several of them were temporarily medically unfit. One had a discharging ear. Many of the medically unfit now appearing in the drafts had never been in any other category and apparently had been enlisted, to fill up a unit and enable the battalion, and of course its colonel, to reach England. On March 2, I paid a visit to Colonel Fotheringham

7 Dr. McGill's "conservatism" might be showing here – many of these men were assigned to pioneer (labour), railway, and forestry units, all of which performed invaluable service in support of the combat units. – P B.

at Westoutre and did not fail to report to him the matter of medically unfit draft details. The day following we had another heavy snowstorm. On March 26 we relieved the 28th Battalion again. The enemy shelled Kemmel Hill during the afternoon but did not seem to do any damage. Rumours were now current that our division was to be transferred to the dreaded Ypres Salient. One of the subalterns declared himself as being against it, saying that he was essentially a man of peace. Support was given to the partial truth of these rumours by the fact that several of the senior officers had been required to make a visit to the Salient for purposes of instruction. They had been shown the area including the famous International Trench, the scene of the recent enemy attack and our successful counterattack. The trench was now in our possession.

The next six days constituted the final tour of duty we were ever called to do in the old line. I never saw it again, except for a brief visit in a motor ambulance a year and a half later, in November of 1917. By then the site of our Regimental Aid Post at S.P. 11 was occupied by horse lines as the enemy had been pushed off Messines Ridge. At the time of our departure in the spring of 1916 the post had become a kind of secondary Battalion Headquarters and quite a little village of elephant iron huts had been assembled and erected. Certain specialists such as bombers⁸ and signallers were also stationed at this point. Lieutenant Petty, the signaling officer, occupied one of the elephant iron shelters and Lieutenant Bradburn, the bombing officer, shared my dugout toward the last.

In the daytime I quite often left the dugout to Bradburn himself for it was his custom to bring in certain hellish contrivances loaded with high explosive. Some of these were torpedoes some six feet in length, designed for the purpose of blowing up the enemy wire defences. Bradburn would calmly sit in the dugout adjusting the detonating mechanism with a screwdriver and a spanner. At such times I modestly felt that if the bombing officer was seeking the crown of a martyr to scientific warfare, I had no right or call to share in the glory. Whenever he gave signs of an urge towards adjusting detonators I would pay a visit to Petty if the latter were not too busy, and while in his shelter could keep a fair thickness of iron between myself and Bradburn's activities.

During the latter part of the winter the night wiring squad was also quartered in this area. These were the men who went out at night to put

8 Grenade throwers. Originally this was a special role for select troops (grenadiers), but later in the war all infantrymen were so trained. – P B.

up and repair our barbed wire entanglements in No Man's Land. One of my duties was to distribute their rum ration when they came in from work and before they went to their blankets.

Corporal Frisk, a splendid soldier, had charge of one of these parties. Frisk was in A Company, commanded by Major Splane who had a story concerning Frisk which illustrated his zeal and high sense of duty. It is necessary for me to explain here that while the wiring parties were out, the Germans were constantly shooting up Very lights, which flooded No Man's Land with a blinding white light for an instant. Experience had taught those engaged in wiring that if they stood stock still at such times they were in little danger of detection. On the other hand the slightest movement was liable to bring a burst of machine gun fire. As Splane's story went, Frisk had given his men definite instructions covering this point. On the night in question a flare went up when one of the men was holding a strand of wire taut. A bullet struck the tight wire just in front of him splattering his face with hot flakes from the wire and jacket of the bullet. Most naturally, the man jerked his head back. According to Splane's jocular account Frisk put the man under arrest for disobedience of orders. I have often seen Frisk since the war – he is farming near Crossfield, Alberta – and have joked with him regarding the incident. Frisk solemnly insists that, as in the case of the report of Mark Twain's death, the story has been grossly exaggerated.

My dugout companion for this last tour of duty was the scout officer of the British battalion that was under orders to relieve us. I have no record of his name, for which I am sorry as he was a very interesting and cheerful companion. He had a keen sense of humour, and, as he had been in the line since early in the war, had many amusing anecdotes to relate. He had once been in charge of a sapper party driving a gallery as a counter-mine to frustrate a German design. A Scotsman in his party was working on the face of the tunnel when he suddenly caught a gleam of light on withdrawing his pick. Applying his eye to the opening he discovered that he had cut right into the end of the German gallery, and sitting a few feet away from him with his rifle across his knees was the German sentry. The wily Scot wasted no time. He quietly closed up the opening and obtained aid. Soon a heavy charge of explosive was packed into the end of our sap and fired, destroying the enemy project and presumably the unobservant sentry. The Scotsman's only comment was, "Aye, he must have been a deaf b—, yon."

Spring was now on its way and the daffodils were in bloom along the watercourses behind our trenches. Our unit was issued with a certain

number of the new steel helmets now coming into use, but the supply was too limited for everyone to be equipped.

At 4:15 a.m., March 27, the dugout in which I was sleeping rocked and shuddered from the explosion of mines to our left in the Ypres Salient. The roar of the explosion reached us at the same instant as did the ground vibration. I have never experienced the phenomenon of an earthquake but believe I have a fair idea of what it must be like. There were three tremendous concussions, followed immediately by an intense bombardment from our artillery. The enemy came back with trench mortar bombs, shrapnel and high explosive shells. By 7 a.m. the bombardment had died down. As the result of the enemy retaliation we had four wounded, all walking cases. One of these was saved from a severe head wound by the protection of his steel helmet. These mines had been sprung by us under the German position at St. Eloi, a few miles away, and the craters had been occupied by the British troops holding that sector. We did not understand the significance of the event at the time, but the series of operations thus started was to cost us heavy casualties before many days.

On March 30 L/Corporal Barnes, in charge of the D Company stretcher bearers, was slightly wounded in the head by a piece of trench mortar bomb. On the last day of the month there was very heavy artillery firing to the northeast where the mines had been exploded four days previously. Private Ashburn of the 53rd Trench Mortar Battery was badly wounded by a shell fragment during the day. That night we were relieved by the 4th Battalion Yorks Territorials and I turned over the Regimental Aid Post to Captain Conde, the medical officer. Our battalion reached Locre at 10:45 p.m.

In the course of the next forenoon, April 1, we moved to billets in the vicinity of Bailleul for five days' rest. It was a fine warm spring day. The march from Locre to Bailleul was a short and pleasant one over clean dry roads, something we had not experienced for months. The men were in a cheerful mood and sang lustily as they marched. Alas for appearances. We were to be the victim of another April fool joke. At 8:30 p.m. that evening the 6th Brigade received orders to move into the Ypres Salient the following day.

XI THE BATTLE OF ST. ELOI

This battle fares like to the morning's war,
When dying clouds contend with growing light,
What time the shepherd, blowing of his nails,
Can neither call it perfect day nor night.

– Shakespeare, *King Henry VI*, Part III, Act II, Scene V

We were up at 6:00 the next morning, April 2, and greeted another fine day. At 8:20 a.m. the battalion marched out and moved with the whole 6th Brigade to take up a new position near St. Eloi, the scene of the recent mine explosions and subsequent fighting. We marched through St. Jans Cappel, over Mont Noir, through Westoutre and Reninghelst, finally going into quarters in a camp of huts to the west of Dickebusch. The huts were comfortable and we had plenty of room. There had been very little falling out during the march although the weather became quite hot as the day advanced. All evening and night a terrific bombardment continued towards our immediate front. The next day I sent three sick to the 6th Canadian Field Ambulance which had taken over from the 7th and 8th British Field Ambulances in Reninghelst. During the day we were cheered by the sight of a considerable group of German prisoners being marched down the road from the direction of the firing. At noon the battalion received orders to move into the trenches that night and take over the line from the south bank of the Ypres-Comines canal to St. Eloi. At 2 p.m. I had the stretcher bearers paraded and inspected equipment, dressing haversacks, etc., all of which were in good condition. I issued fresh stocks of iodine, morphine and dressings. Everyone going into action, not already supplied, was issued a steel helmet.

At 5 p.m. on April 3, the unit marched out of the camp and headed for the front. The roads were crowded with transport and our progress was very slow and tedious, made more so by the innumerable halts. At one of these, on the way in before dark, the enemy burst several large-calibre shells high over our heads. This particular type of shell was very imposing. It travelled with a roar like an express train and detonated with a tremendous noise and a huge billow of black smoke. Its purpose

must have been to demoralize for it burst too high in the air to do much material damage. I never learned of any casualties being caused by it. Certainly on this occasion we sustained none.

A short distance before we turned off the Ypres-Messines road we passed a château known to the troops as Bedford House, which was the sight of a field ambulance dressing station. As we approached Spoil Bank after dark, we came across the remains of a line of shallow dugout shelters that had been made along the canal bank. All had been torn to pieces and the contents scattered in every direction. Rifles and bits of accoutrement littered the ground everywhere, unmistakable evidence of the intensity and accuracy of the enemy artillery fire during the fighting of recent days. Many of our men salvaged the Lee-Enfield rifles and took them into the line, for they had developed a deep distrust for the Ross rifle with which the 2nd Division was still armed.

And this brings me to the question of the Ross rifle and its suitability for active service conditions, a question that gave rise to much debate and furious recrimination even before the war. The controversy was active at the time of which I am now writing and Sir Sam Hughes was an insistent advocate of the Ross. I do not pose as an expert on small arms, and can offer no opinion founded upon direct evidence. I can only cite my observations at the time for what they are worth, and I do know that during the fighting our men discarded their Ross rifles for Lee-Enfields secured from casualties whenever they had the opportunity. And this was not all. Soon it became a crime in our division for a man to be lacking his regulation Ross rifle, and, after the promulgation of the divisional order making this so, many of the troops, loaded down as they were with equipment and ammunition, staggered along with two rifles – one a Lee-Enfield to fight with in the line and the other for parade purposes. Certainly, to me the sight of weary soldiers going in and out of the line carrying two rifles was one most impressive and depressive, indicating as it did their loss of faith in the weapon that Canada's war minister had forced into their hands, and upon which their lives might often depend.

If our men had been old regular soldiers, trained and familiar with the Lee-Enfield, and actuated by the old soldier's well known prejudices, the circumstances I relate might have no particular significance. But this was not the case. The great majority of our boys knew no other rifle than the Ross, and yet, almost without exception, they discarded the weapon with which they were familiar for another kind. Shortly after this the whole division was rearmed with the short Lee-Enfield, and the

men were happy with renewed confidence. I can remember on the occasion of one of my visits to the fire trench when we were holding the Kemmel front seeing a Ross rifle that had been hit by a shell. The barrel had been bent into the shape of the letter "S." A wag had hung it upon the side of the trench and in derision had attached a placard bearing the inscription, "Ross rifle after 15 rounds rapid fire."¹

While I had been addressing the Ross rifle question in my diary, the platoons of our unit had been moving into the trenches and taking over from the 7th King's Shropshire Light Infantry and the 8th East Yorks. These British battalions were seriously reduced in strength by the heavy fighting they had endured. The dugouts for the Battalion Headquarters and Regimental Aid Post at Spoil Bank were sited almost on top of the south bank of the canal which cut through a fairly high hill at this point. Why tunnels had not been driven into the banks at a lower level and good head cover thus obtained I shall never know. I remember the question puzzled me at the time. Later on in the summer, when our corps was again in this area, the engineers actually carried out the work. The tunnels constructed were furnished with electric lights and afforded comparatively safe and comfortable quarters.

Rifle and artillery fire were both brisk as we moved into our positions. Corporal Horton was shot through the thigh with a machine gun bullet as he walked along the path at the foot of the bank. I carried him up to the aid post shelter and dressed his wound. Afterwards I sent him out to the Advanced Dressing Station at Bedford House. A Company which was assigned the right of our line, including No. 5 Crater, was not in direct communication with the balance of the battalion, so I decided that the casualties from that section would have to go out to Voormezele through a communication trench called Convent Lane.

The vicinity of the headquarters and the aid post, including the shelters I have mentioned, had been heavily shelled the day before, and besides the resultant wreckage, shocking sanitary conditions were apparent. After I had attended to Corporal Horton's wound and had taken over the aid post, I went into the headquarters dugout and waited for the relief to be completed. It was long past midnight when a message came through from A Company that this was done. Whether the whole of the front that should have been taken over, actually was, I do not know.

1 For an account of the Ross rifle scandal, see G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: The Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1962). 155-59. - P B.

The morning of April 4 was cloudy and misty, and the temperature had fallen considerably. Artillery fire had continued throughout the night and we had sent out a number of casualties. At 2 p.m. A Company was being heavily shelled, and later a message came from them that they had a number of casualties that were going out to the village of Voormezele through Convent Lane. As we had relieved the unit having its Regimental Aid Post at this point, the message made me anxious for I correctly concluded that there would be no medical officer there to take care of the wounded when they arrived. In the course of the day we cleared 12 wounded through our post at Spoil Bank, eight from our own and four from other units.

At 7 p.m. I made up my mind to visit Voormezele to ascertain actual conditions there. I left Spoil Bank with Willis, accompanied by Major Hewgill, Major Doughty and Lieutenant Hanson. When we arrived at the aid post we found that no M.O. was present as the British medical officer had left with his unit. However, a squad of the 6th Field Ambulance had taken over and Corporal Struthers, the N.C.O. in charge, was doing excellent work. He had a number of wounded in the dugouts, including five from the 31st Battalion, one of whom was Stretcher Bearer Northard of A Company who had sustained shell wounds in the face and foot. He had already cleared some as the motor ambulance could drive up to the door. Indeed while we were there an ambulance drove up and Lieut.-Col. Campbell, the commanding officer of the unit, arrived with it. I remained at the aid post with Corporal Struthers until we caught up with dressing the wounded. Willis and I had packed down a good supply of dressings, so I left most of these with Struthers whose stock was running low.

It was now quite dark. After the situation at the Voormezele Regimental Aid Post was well in hand, I proceeded up Convent Lane with the other officers towards the firing line. It was not a pretty sight in front of us. The enemy was subjecting our line and the mound with its craters in front of St. Eloi, to a most intense and concentrated bombardment. It was a sickening and terrible spectacle. We had the impression of walking into a blazing furnace. Soon we began to meet walking casualties making their way down the communication trench. Among them was Lieutenant Robertson, machine gun officer of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry. I returned with some of the wounded to Voormezele Regimental Aid Post where I found that Captain McDermid, M.O. of the 29th Battalion, had taken over. One of the wounded was Lieutenant Bradburn, our bombing officer.

At 1 a.m. on April 5 I returned to Spoil Bank and found that a collection of walking wounded had gathered there during my absence. These we cleared to Bedford House. The artillery duel maintained its full intensity throughout the night. Walking wounded continued to pass through our hands all day but those unable to walk were forced to remain in the trenches until after dark. Many casualties were being reported from the front line. At 7 p.m. Willis and I made another visit to Voormezele and went up Convent Lane as far as the bombers' dugout in Shell Alley. A stretcher squad was going up to the firing line to bring out Sergeant Wilson of A Company who was reported badly wounded. The shelling had almost ceased. At 9 p.m. we returned to Voormezele and two hours later Sergeant Wilson was brought in. He afterwards died of his wounds.² By this time the enemy was busily engaged in shelling our right again. It was midnight when we returned to Spoil Bank.

By 2 a.m. April 6 we had all of our wounded cleared from the Spoil Bank aid post, and I lay down in an attempt to get a little sleep. I was aroused at 3:30, and the following extract from my diary explains why:

A most terrific and concentrated bombardment taking place on our position in front of and about St. Eloi. Enemy using trench torpedoes and artillery shells of all kinds and sizes. Hundreds of shells must be bursting per minute. We must expect heavy casualties, especially by way of Voormezele.

I do not know that I can add much to what I wrote down at the time to describe the scene from the top of the hill at Spoil Bank. I went out of the dugout and climbed the bank from whence I had a clear view of the devastating rain of shells bursting in our line less than a mile away. I was close enough to see the burning fuses of the trench mortar bombs as they described the sharp curves of their courses. The air seemed to be full of them. I shuddered to think of what our poor fellows of D Company were enduring under this hail of fire and steel. The uproar and turmoil of battle lasted throughout the day. Wounded coming in, told of an infantry attack being repulsed from our battalion front, but some were of the opinion that the Germans had obtained a foothold in the craters to our right. All morning and afternoon we worked in the Regimental Aid Post dugout dressing and sending out wounded, chiefly walking

2 Sgt. George Wilson, died of wounds, April 6, 1916, age 26. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 808.

cases. Stretcher Bearer Avery of A Company came in with shell wounds of the back. He had dressed wounded for 48 hours under shell fire and carried on for some time after being hit himself. Captain MacPherson was wounded by a bomb and sent out to Bedford House.

Cases of shattered nerves appeared in the stream of wounded, but only some half dozen in all. I sent the worst of these out to the 6th Field Ambulance at Bedford House, but the majority I allowed to lie down in an adjoining dugout. I also detained a few men who had been buried by shells as I counted upon making use of them later.

By 6 p.m. the bombardment had died down. Many dead and wounded were reported from the front lines. Seventy bearers from the 6th Field Ambulance prepared to clear the right sector of wounded by way of Voormezele after dark. Several badly wounded were reported from C Company which was holding the centre of our battalion front and from which an enemy infantry attack had been repulsed. Rain was now falling. At 8 p.m. I left for the front line with Major Hewgill, taking with me Corporal Bright and a party of the men who had been resting in the dugout. On our way we met a scout coming in to report at Headquarters. He and his companion had been out all day scouting between the lines during the action. His mate had been killed by a Jack Johnson³ as they were making their way back to our lines after dark.

We went up to where the front line had been. A battery of our nine-point-twos was playing on the German trenches in front of our position and planting shells within a short distance of our front line. The trenches occupied by C Company had been pretty well obliterated, but a few shallow dugouts remained intact within which the wounded and those not on guard duty were sheltered from the rain which was coming down in sheets. Many of the off duty unwounded, worn out as they were by the strain and exertion of the day, were sleeping soundly in spite of the crashing explosions and concussion of our heavy shells. Private Currie had lain helplessly wounded in these battered trenches since the night before.⁴

I turned to work on the wounded and Bright and I kept busy until midnight. I redressed a number, including Sergeant Proven who had

3 Army slang for a fifteen-centimetre German shell named after Jack Johnson, the first black heavy-weight champion of the world, a title he held from 1908 until 1915.

4 Pte. Arthur Currie, died of wounds, April 8, 1916. *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, Wigney, 73.

sustained a severe compound fracture of the right thigh. Corporal Bright and I redressed his wounds and splinted the fractured limb. We then strapped him to a stretcher and made up a carrying party from the men we had taken up with us. Proven's condition was poor through shock and loss of blood and I had little hope of his ultimate recovery.⁵ Events were to prove my fears well founded, for the poor fellow later died of wounds. There were two Provens in the battalion, brothers, one in C Company and one in A. Both were sergeants. I remember them distinctly as both were exceptionally fine soldiers. Later on in the war, the other brother was also killed in action.⁶ Whenever I think of them after so many years I am filled with pity for the mother in her grief at the loss of two such sons.

All of the wounded that could possibly walk, I sent out with this first carrying party. Among them I remember Scotland, a fine soldier as his name would indicate. Scotland had a severe face wound involving the destruction of one eye but was able to walk out with the help of someone to lead him. In later years the sight of the other eye failed, leaving him totally blind. Gradually we arranged enough men in carrying parties to take out all of the stretcher cases overland. By 5:00 in the early dawn the last of the wounded had been sent out. Rain was still falling.

During the day of the battle I had received a report that Stretcher Bearer Wilkinson was lying badly wounded in the crater to our extreme right. Private Preece had come down through the enemy barrage for dressings in the heat of the action. We supplied him with a sack full of shell dressings, a bottle of iodine and a stock of morphine tablets. He retraced his hazardous path and reached the line safely with his valuable burden.

There was considerable artillery activity the next morning, April 7, but the day seemed quiet and peaceful after the thunderous din of the preceding day. A number of men reported with chilled and sodden feet. These came chiefly from the men of A Company who had been in water

5 Successful blood transfusing developed after American doctors serving in France introduced blood typing and anti-clotting techniques. By 1917 the casualty clearing stations provided blood transfusions for the prevention of shock.

6 Both brothers were born in Galashiels, Scotland. James Spalding Proven, who died of wounds on April 15, was a former bank clerk when he enlisted at Claresholm. His brother, William Proven, who enlisted at Calgary, was a carpenter by trade and belonged to the 103rd Calgary Rifles. He died of wounds on March 7, 1917. *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, Wigney, 619.

and mud about the crater for 48 hours before being relieved by D Company. We had them wash their feet in cold water, dry them thoroughly and then apply whale oil from a can of this commodity which we had found in one of the shelled dugouts. We provided the men with clean dry socks until our stock was exhausted. In the course of the forenoon, I had Corporal Dace get together a fatigue party made up of the partially recovered nerve and exhausted cases and begin a sanitary cleanup of the area about the Regimental Aid Post and Battalion Headquarters.

At 5:00 in the evening we had a furious bombardment of one hour upon our long-suffering right sector. What remained of our communication trench, Convent Lane, leading up to Voormezele, was smashed to pieces. As a set off we received word that the 19th Battalion would relieve our unit after dark. By 2:00 the following morning I had all my wounded cleared from the aid post at Spoil Bank. The morning turned out bright and clear. D Company on our right had not been relieved because the guides lost their way in the dark among the almost-demolished trenches. The two companies on our left had been relieved, but so late that they were unable to get clear of the front area before daylight. This meant that they had to remain concealed in the support trenches until the fall of darkness allowed them to move out of the area. During this waiting period we were beset with the fear that the enemy might spot them, in which case they surely would be subjected to heavy shelling. Fortunately nothing of the kind happened. In the course of the forenoon, Lieutenant Petty's platoon of D Company, that had been holding a crater, was finally relieved. They had endured cruel losses but brought out several prisoners with them. At 11 a.m. only two wounded were in our dugout, but several worn out and exhausted officers and men were sleeping on the stretchers that we set out for them. At 8 p.m. the balance of the battalion moved out under cover of darkness. We all marched back to the divisional reserve huts at Camp A west of Dickebusch where we had spent the night before going into action.

The following morning I held a late sick parade. Several badly shocked and exhausted men appeared and also four wounded that had not reported while the action was in progress. Besides these a corporal of the 8th East Yorks reported with trench feet. He belonged to their machine gun section, and for some reason had been left behind when we relieved their battalion. He had now come out with us after having been in the trenches continually for 21 days. His name was Parsons.

The action in which we had been engaged was beyond all comparison the most severe and important encounter in which our unit had taken

part since coming to France. All ranks had behaved splendidly. Lieut.-Colonel Bell said that he had always supposed the battalion worthy of the utmost confidence and that now he knew it. Our casualties consisted of 29 killed, six officers and 148 other ranks wounded and four men missing, probably buried in the mud of the craters and trenches by shell fire.⁷

The weather during this tour out of the line did not at all conform to any previous conception of a French spring. It was cold and exceedingly uncomfortable. The temperatures remained low, and rain or snow fell nearly every day. On April 14 I visited the Assistant Director of Medical Services in Reninghelst and travelled both ways through a snowstorm.

The first few days out of the line were utilized by the unit in recovering from the effects of the severe ordeal through which we had passed, drying and cleaning clothing, replacing lost and damaged equipment and in short getting into proper condition again. Although I had not received a wound myself I found my uniform in a sorry mess. The knees of my riding breeches were soaked through with blood from my kneeling when dressing wounded in the low dugouts. The men reported to me that during the action they had nearly always found their pocket ampoules of iodine tincture broken when the time came to use them.⁸

During this period a system of working parties for the front line was put into operation. We were in divisional reserve, and the time so occupied was ordinarily supposed to be devoted to training and refitting. Now a large working party was drafted from the unit every night, marched for miles through the mud and darkness and put to work in the forward area, repairing trenches, putting up barbed wire and doing other fatigue duties. How happy and appropriate a word is "fatigue" in its military application. In some instances large bodies of men were marched for miles and kept without sleep all night for the net result of having a few stakes or rolls of barbed wire carried up the communication

7 Though badly bloodied, the 31st Battalion actually got off "lightly" when compared to some of its sister battalions in the 6th Brigade – the 27th (Winnipeg) Battalion lost over 400 men. St. Eloi was a catastrophe for the 5th and 6th Brigades. Rather than cashier Brigadier-General Ketchen and Major-General Turner, the commanders of the 6th Brigade and 2nd Division, as the British rightly recommended, Hughes intervened to sack General Alderson, the British officer commanding the Canadian Corps, saving the two Canadians' careers for the time being. – P B.

8 Ordinary soldiers' first aid kits contained iodine, morphine, and anti-tetanus serum, as well as sterile bandages.

April 15/1916.

Dear Miss Griffis,--

Your letter of March 23 came to hand two days ago. A couple of big bundles of papers also arrived but I do not know by whom they were sent. Do not think the papers you send are not appreciated even if I am discontented enough to fail thanking you.

We are now out in divisional reserve but expect to go back into the trenches in a few days. The men are getting well rested up and they needed it for our last trip in was a very trying ordeal as you well would probably read in the papers. It was in fact our first real action and the battalion behaved splendidly. Anything we had hitherto experienced in the way of war was a pink tea compared with what we were up against those few days. The Germans made several attacks after frightful artillery bombardments in each case. One bombardment began about 3 in the morning and lasted for 18 hours without a break. Hundreds of shells per minute must have exploded in our lines during that time. Our artillery

sent back just as good as we got and
 bet perhaps a little more. A number
 of Germans came over and surrendered
 to get out of the shell fire. A lot of the
 German infantry coming over to attack
 seemed half dazed, probably by the terrible
 shell fire, and were shot down like sheep
 in front of our trenches, or at least what
 had been our trenches. In many places
 both our own and the enemy trenches
 were wiped completely out of existence.
 Most of us got scarcely any sleep for
 four days and nights. We were in fire
 days but the last one was comparatively
 quiet. You will be pleased to know that
 our battalion did not lose an inch of
 ground. In one case four bombers
 broke up an enemy infantry attack
 after shooting ^{the German} their officer. I used to
 wonder why men went insane under
 shell fire but understand it perfectly
 now. However we had very few cases
 of nervous breakdown.

Now I must stop giving you war news
 as the censor will take an oration to hold
 up the letter. Besides you will probably
 be able to read that sort of thing told in
 a better way in the papers. When one is
 in an action he sees only the very

small part that comes under his individual notice and is liable to give a wrong impression.

You asked about Drs. E. C. Mason, Hogg Hazard and F. C. Clark. I have not seen any of them since we came to France last September. I understand Col. Mason is still with his battalion in England. I do not know where the other two are but know that the unit Major Hazard was with has been broken up and the men sent over in drafts.

The spring seems to take as long in coming here as in Alberta. We had a few warm days in the beginning of the month but lately the weather has been very wet and cold. The leaves are not out on the trees yet and we had a smart little snow storm yesterday afternoon. The birds occasionally do a little singing but what they have to sing about in this country I do not know.

I nearly forgot to tell you that I saw Dr. A. H. Taylor the night we came out of the trenches. His battalion was just moving up to the front and I did not have time to more than say Hello to him.

An overin.

Yours sincerely
Sherold W. McMill

trench to the front line. The march up to the front line and back was a good day's work, or rather night's work, in itself. And this was not all. Our front was quite lively at the time, and our work parties suffered casualties nearly every trip. On the night of April 14-15 we had four casualties, and two nights later our working party lost one killed, three wounded and one missing. I shall again refer to this subject.

On April 18 we received orders to move into brigade reserve in the village of Dickebusch and in Scottish Wood. The latter was, of course, an army name and was applied to a beautiful little forest of oaks situated between Dickebusch Lake and the front line, about half a mile west of Voormezele. I went with the portion of the unit occupying the wood.

April 19 was a cold rainy day. We had one company well forward in close support of the unit holding the front line, but the rest of us were comfortably quartered in the huts concealed in Scottish Wood. It was a quiet day up to 7 p.m. when quite suddenly all of our field artillery in the proximity of the wood went into full action. A few minutes later the unit received orders to occupy Voormezele Switch, a secondary defence system sited between the village of Voormezele and the front line. The Germans were making an attack, and we were reported to be in possession of Crater 6, the St. Eloi crater which had played a major part in our action of the early part of the month. The battalion moved off and I followed with my orderlies and batman, Bright, Willis and Befus. We carried two sacks of dressings with us and left the balance of our medical kit to follow later with the transport.

Personally I felt somewhat relieved to get away from the noise of our field artillery, several batteries of which were located quite close to us behind the wood and were firing directly over our heads. The "Heavies" were also firing, and while they made a great row the sharp staccato snapping reports of the field guns were much more distressing. I had a cold in the head at the time, and before leaving the wood I was suffering acute pain in my ear drums from the effect of the explosions.

By 8:30 p.m. we had opened an aid post in a dugout in the village of Voormezele. The 6th Field Ambulance lent us ten blankets for the use of the wounded. During the night we cleared ten casualties to the ambulance, five of whom belonged to our battalion. Among the others was a pioneer⁹ shot through the abdomen.

9 A Pioneer Battalion, made up of tradesmen and labourers, all of whom were considered physically unfit for combat, was now attached to a division to reduce the need to employ frontline soldiers for engineering and repair duties.

The next morning at noon two companies of our unit moved back to Scottish Wood. No fresh casualties appeared during the forenoon and the artillery seemed quiet after the night's activity. I remained in Voor-mezele with my small staff. We treated one casualty during the night of April 20–21. The morning was bright and clear with a southwest wind. In the afternoon we rejoined our unit in Scottish Wood.

Our battalion was relieved by the 18th Battalion that evening and made a long weary march back to a camp called I Camp, located between Reninghelst and Westoutre. On this occasion I gave over to Captain Hale of the 18th Battalion. He is now a prominent physician in London, Ontario. At 8:30 p.m. I left the wood with Major Doughty and the Padre, Captain Walker. Rain was falling in torrents, the roads were covered with mud, and we met a lot of transport blocking the roads in Dickebusch. We reached our camp at 11:30 p.m. after a three-hour walk through the rain and mud. Three of the companies had come in, all very tired.

The next morning, April 22, it was raining hard and very cold. The men were allowed to remain in bed until late. Before I was out of bed myself, I was awakened by the divisional sanitary officer for the purpose of listening to a voluble indictment of the sanitary condition of the camp. As our men had not arrived until nearly midnight, and were still undisturbed on account of their weariness, I made the submission with all deference that if anyone had cause for complaint it was our commanding officer after having to take over a dirty camp in the middle of a wet night with a worn-out battalion.

I did not hold my sick parade until 2 p.m. There were 16 on parade, many of whom complained of general muscular pain and showed rapid pulse, signs of beginning exhaustion. Rain poured all day and was still at it after dark. The next day I sent three cases of varicose veins to hospital. The recent heavy work and extra exertion had brought these men, some of whom had given many months of excellent service, to the stage of rendering them medically unfit. On the night of April 24, a working party of 300 was sent to the front line. Anything I have said before in this connection applies with double force to this instance, for the distance was nearly twice as great. On April 26 there was heavy artillery firing. The next day we had a man wounded by a live cartridge that had been thrown into the camp incinerator. The weather was still fine on April 28, a pleasant change from what we had experienced ever since we had come into the famous, or rather infamous, Ypres Salient.

The battalion was under orders to move to Dickebusch on April 28, and we marched out for that point at 2:30 in the afternoon. By 6 p.m. I had taken over the medical inspection room in the village. The next day when I held sick parade at 7:30 a.m., I found a number of the men appearing were on the verge of exhaustion. These were the victims of the accursed system of working parties. In the afternoon the enemy shelled close to Battalion Headquarters but did no damage. At midnight a report came in that two enemy deserters had come over to E trenches in front of Kemmel, the scene of our operations during the preceding winter. As these deserters had stated that an enemy gas attack was billed to take place during the night, the battalion was ordered to "Stand to."

The arrival of German deserters just before a discharge of gas into our lines was by no means an uncommon occurrence. This would lead one to suppose that the enemy feared his own gas and that some of the weaker spirits across No Man's Land preferred the hazard of deserting and being made prisoners to being involved in the dangers of their own gas offensive.

At 12:40 a.m., April 30, we received word that gas was being projected opposite Vierstraat, and the gas alarm was sounded. We all put on our gas masks. Our artillery opened an intense fire upon the German lines to our right, and we had a fine view of that most terrible and magnificent spectacle, a night bombardment of maximum intensity and extent. Our immediate front was quiet and the wind was from the east. By 3 a.m. the bombardment was dying down. There were no more signs of gas so we removed our masks.

The civilian inhabitants of these forward areas had also been furnished with gas masks. Major Splane was billeted in a house with an old civilian couple in Dickebusch. He gave an amusing account of his returning to his billet after the gas danger was over and finding these two poor old folks together in bed still wearing their gas helmets. We afterwards heard that an attack had actually been made on the Kemmel front which was held by a Welsh battalion. These stout fellows were all ready for the occasion and gave the enemy visitors "what for," as the Tommies would say. The morning came again bright and clear. I sent three much-exhausted men to the field ambulance.

Between 10:00 and 12:00 in the morning the enemy gave Dickebusch another vigorous shelling. Several casualties were sustained but none by our unit. It was a near thing though for Lieutenant Robertson of the 31st Battalion. He had been out all night with a working party. The

forenoon was warm and he had lain down in a corner of a room in the empty house where he had his quarters. Finding the tiled floor a hard mattress he had gone to get a bundle of sand bags for a pillow. While he was absent a shell took away the corner of the house where he had been lying. I was reminded of the incident in *Pickwick* in which Mr. Winkle is described as firing his gun over the small boy's head in the exact spot where the long gamekeeper's brain would have been had he been standing in the boy's place. At 10:30 p.m. we had another gas alarm but no gas appeared. This was the last day of April, 1916.

May opened with a fine warm morning. I sent four men who were too exhausted for trench duty back to the transport lines. The enemy shelled the village once again at 3:00 in the afternoon. That evening the battalion received orders to go into brigade reserve, two companies to go to Scottish Wood and the remainder to Voormezele. I decided to go to the latter with the two forward companies and left for that point with Major Hewgill at 7:40 p.m. We reached Voormezele in less than an hour and I took over the auxiliary Regimental Aid Post. The village had been badly knocked about by shell fire during the afternoon. May 2 was bright with a southeast wind, the direction of gas danger. Between 1:15 and 2:30 p.m. the village was vigorously shelled with 15-cm howitzers. The aid post was not hit but some of the bodies of buried soldiers were torn from their graves in the little cemetery across the road. I believe that Lieut.-Col. Buller who had commanded the P.P.C.L.I. was buried there.¹⁰ At 4 p.m. I visited Scottish Wood. The 31st Battalion was taking over the front line that night. The men appeared greatly fatigued and done in. At 8 p.m. I took over the regular Regimental Aid Post from Captain Hart, M.O. of the 25th Battalion.

Before 3 a.m. on May 3 we had passed 15 casualties through our aid post, two of them dangerously wounded. Ten had shell wounds and five had been hit by rifle bullets. By units, five belonged to the 31st Battalion, two to the 19th Battalion and eight to the 2nd Battalion Pioneers. The morning was bright with a west wind. At 3 p.m. the enemy put up a few shells into the village but hit nobody. At 8 p.m. the wind switched into

10 Lieut.-Col. Herbert Cecil Buller, killed in action, June 2, 1916, age 34, during the opening stages of the Battle of Mount Sorrel, was buried in Voormezele Enclosure #3. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 97. Buller was instantly killed by a shell while directing the infantry fire on the attacking Germans. N. M. Christie, ed., *Letters of Agar Adamson* (Nepean, ON: CEF Books, 1997), 183.

the east and the gas alert was on, which simply means that all ranks were warned to be in instant readiness to don their gas masks.

During the night, up to daybreak at 4 a.m. on May 4 we had attended eight casualties. Five were from the 31st Battalion, all stretcher cases. One belonged to the 29th Battalion and two came from the 2nd Pioneers. One of these latter was an oldish-looking undersized little man, but not as old as he looked. He had a big head and wore thick heavy glasses, and these two features combined with his solemn expression gave him a somewhat owlsh appearance. He had been shot through the forearm and had been dressed by the stretcher bearer who brought him in. I complimented the first aid man on his work but explained that he was not to put on his bandages quite so tight as subsequent swelling might impede circulation in the limb. At this the wounded man turned to the boy who had attended him, and in a most paternal manner admonished the first aid man to give good heed and to remember what the medical officer said. All this time he had been talking away in a somewhat oratorical fashion, giving us his history and telling us all his military hopes and aspirations. It seemed that he was the battalion cobbler and as such was not called upon to perform front line duties with the working parties. However his zeal to serve his king and country prompted him to volunteer for this night's working party. He said that he felt like a slacker sitting back driving pegs into boots while his comrades were exposed to death and wounds. When he reached the scene of action in No Man's Land he found his poor vision a serious handicap, for in the darkness he was as blind as a bat. But he soon found an outlet for his energy. When a German flare went up and the others of the party stood as rigid as statues the cobbler went furiously to work, making up for lost time, with the result a German sniper soon spotted him and drilled him through the arm.

As the cobbler recounted the manner of his receiving his wound, all those in the dugout, including the wounded on stretchers, burst into laughter; and as the narrator looked around through his heavy glasses with a puzzled quizzical expression of pained surprise on his features, the mirth redoubled. One has only to remember my earlier account of Corporal Frisk's wiring party in order to understand the wounded soldiers' appreciation of the joke. Good luck to the little cobbler. He had a small body but a heart as big as a lion's. He went off to the ambulance shaking his head, and doubtless in pained wonderment at the unsympathetic reception of his story.

At 10:00 in the forenoon the day was quite hot and a gentle east wind was blowing. Sharp on the hour of 3 p.m. the enemy once more shelled the village. By now we confidently expected this afternoon strafe right on time. By daybreak at 4 a.m. on May 5, we had cleared six wounded within the preceding 24 hours, most of them severe. One had 27 wounds including one that had torn part of his ankle away. The day came out quite hot and the wind was southwest which meant that we were relieved of the gas menace for the time being. The enemy missed his 3 p.m. bombardment but made up for the delay by giving an extra heavy dose two hours later.

There were fewer casualties on May 6, but two of these deserve notice. One was a 29th Battalion man. A bullet had penetrated his steel helmet but was so far spent that it made only a severe bruise on the underlying scalp. The other man, belonging to a trench mortar battery, was not so fortunate. A German “dud” or unexploded shell of 10.5 cm-calibre lay in a yard near our aid post. This excited the man’s curiosity and he fired his rifle at the fuse in the nose of the shell. The result was that the shell detonated and a fragment tore the left side of the man’s skull away. He died in the aid post. The victim of this strange accident seemed to be conscious despite his fearful head injury and appeared to be watching us with wide open eyes. He died without speaking. Evidently **the injury to the left side of the brain had destroyed the speech centre located there.**

That evening our unit was relieved by the 29th Battalion. Two companies and the headquarters went back to Scottish Wood. The following evening the fields about the Wood were heavily shelled indicating that the enemy was searching for our field batteries. He did no damage to the guns but managed to set a farmhouse on fire. On May 8 we were relieved by the 18th Battalion and moved back to E Camp near Reninghelst. Many ex-members of the Canadian Corps will remember the windmill that stood close by.

Around noon on May 10, I walked down into Reninghelst to pay my respects to Colonel Fotheringham. On the street I met an officer of striking appearance in the uniform of a lieutenant-general whom I had never seen before. Rather to my surprise instead of returning my salute in the usual mechanical fashion he took the trouble to bid me good morning. This was such a small thing, but never afterwards have I wavered in my intense admiration of that splendid soldier and gentleman, Sir Julian Byng or Viscount Byng of Vimy, as he afterwards became. Later on in the day I found out who he was.

I must also speak of my visit to the Assistant Director of Medical Services who greeted me kindly, almost like a family physician receiving a patient in his office. Colonel Fotheringham enquired how my nerves were standing the strain and how I was sleeping. I was able to assure him that while my nerves seemed all right in times of peace, I had serious doubts as to their condition whenever I came under shell or machine gun fire. As to being able to sleep, I told him that I could attain considerable success in that direction when I had the opportunity. This was my second personal experience within an hour that made me feel that war was not all blood and iron.

XII THE COMING OF GENERAL BYNG

Beat loud the tambourines, let the trumpets blow,
That this great soldier may his welcome know.

– Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, Act IV, Scene V

I feel that it is necessary for me to recount a few happenings that occurred about this time and which had a great influence upon the well being of our division and of the whole of the Canadian Corps.

The first was the coming of Lieut.-General Sir Julian Byng¹ in command of the Canadian Corps. By what inexplicable method of telepathy, or whatever one may term the occult means of communication, is a military commander able to infuse his own resolute spirit into the men under his command and inspire them with renewed hope, confidence and courage? Before General Byng had been our leader for more than a few days, or weeks at most, and before even a small minority of our men knew him by sight, the spirit of the troops was wonderfully improved and strengthened. Another boon to the 2nd Division was the coming of Colonel N. W. Webber as chief staff officer.² Colonel Depree had left us some time before and another had taken his place. Now Colonel Webber of the Royal Engineers came to us. He was quite a young man for his rank, 36 years of age. His father was a London stock broker, and was killed that year on the Somme while serving as a subaltern at the age of 67. The first thing Colonel Webber did was to put a stop to those awful working parties with their long exhausting night marches. Instead he made drafts upon the various units for the help he needed, and these he kept billeted close behind the lines in Dickebusch where they could get a little rest and sleep.

1 General Byng replaced General Alderson as commander of the Canadian Corps in May 1916.

2 Norman Webber was one of several very able British staff officers attached to the Canadian Corps who contributed greatly to its growing efficiency and professionalism. Webber took over as Brigadier, General Staff (the senior staff position) of the Corps in April 1918 and held that position until late October. – P B.

Just before this change occurred I was becoming much concerned about the physical state of the men. Nearly all of those appearing on sick parade were on the verge of exhaustion. Some mornings there would be scarcely a man showing a pulse rate of less than a hundred. Our hospital admission rate was high. At this juncture the Lieut.-Col. Bell received a communication from Brigade suggesting that our high sick rate was due to lack of camp sanitation. I remember how indignant the Colonel was. I had given him a memorandum on the subject explaining my theory of the cause of the unsatisfactory health conditions, but it is unlikely that this had any influence. However a great improvement in the condition of the men immediately followed the changes introduced by Colonel Webber. They now had the leisure to indulge in the occasional game of football when out of the line.

We had several days of rain during our time in E Camp, but the weather was warm and the camp was a comfortable one. I took advantage of the occasion to give lectures to my stretcher bearers, our machine gun section, and to the 6th Brigade Stokes Gun Battery. On May 16 a little stir was caused in camp by a German plane dropping bombs close by in the afternoon and again at night.

I remember that at this time we had attached to our unit Lieut.-Col. Snell, the commanding officer of the 46th Battalion, a unit of the 4th Canadian Division, then training in England. We all liked Colonel Snell and enjoyed the time he spent with us. After he returned to England he was injured by an accidental bomb explosion and was unable to bring his unit to the front when his division was moved to France. After his return to Canada, he was with Robert Simpson Company, and I believe was manager of the Montreal store at the time of his death.

It will be noted that at this period we were coming into contact with many more units of our division than had been the case the previous winter in the Kemmel area. This was because we were holding our front in much greater depth than formerly, and reliefs were carried out by brigades instead of by battalions.

May 24, Queen Victoria's birthday, was not a holiday so far as the war was concerned, but the day was fine and warm. Camping in Scottish Wood was really a pleasant experience under the circumstances. I remember we were interested in watching the antics of a stray cat that made the wood its home and was busy upon the enterprise of attempting the capture of some of the nesting birds of which the wood was full. We could hear the call of the cuckoo on all sides.

On clear days the aeroplanes were very active at this period. We relieved the 29th Battalion in the front line on May 27. Just as we formed up to march off at 8 in the evening, the Germans burst two heavy shells over the wood. The fragments fell all around us among the trees but nobody was hit. These happened to be the double fuse type of shell. Unfortunately one of the men saw a nose cap fall near him, and picked it up. As he did so the percussion fuse detonated tearing off his hand as cleanly as though it had been severed by an axe.³

At 9 p.m. I took over the Regimental Aid Post in Voormezeele. Since our last occupation the engineers had built a fine new post. Our former quarters had been an elephant iron hut which afforded no protection at all except against splinters. Close by there had stood a tall brick chimney which undoubtedly the enemy had used as a ranging mark for his artillery. Now this was knocked down, whether by shell or by our own engineers, I never knew. The new aid post was constructed in the cellar of the brasserie, or brewery, and was provided by splendid head cover, proof against anything but shells of the largest calibre.

This was a much less trying tour of duty than the one preceding as the men were in much better physical condition, and the spirit of the troops had infinitely improved. An important contributing factor towards the latter, other than those already mentioned, was the fact that the whole division had recently been rearmed throughout with the short version of the Lee-Enfield rifle. We had few casualties, although one of our men was killed on May 28. I did not have much to do at this time and improved the occasion by re-reading an old favourite, *Pickwick Papers*, as I rested in my shell-proof cellar. I had reason to find out how good the cellar was, for on May 31, the last day of our tour, it stood up under a direct hit from a 15-cm shell. This shell was a “dud” i.e., it did not explode; neither did it penetrate the roof. On May 29 a British plane was brought down behind our trenches. The pilot was found sitting dead in his seat with his field dressing open in his hands. He had died while attempting to dress his machine gun bullet wounds.⁴ At 11 p.m., May 31, I turned the Regimental Aid Post over to Captain Hart of the 25th

3 Private Geoffrey Monck had his right hand blown off. War Diary of M.O., 31st Battalion, 27 May 1916. Harold and Emma McGill, f. 742, Glenbow Archives.

4 The pilot was F. W. Barrett of the Royal Flying Corps. Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 101.

Battalion and went back with our unit to H Camp which we reached at 1 a.m., June 1.

Camp H was a pleasant spot in the neighbourhood of Reninghelst. We had come to the end of two months of strenuous activity in the ill-reputed Ypres Salient and we looked forward to a few days in camp, but in this we were disappointed as will be seen.

Before proceeding to relate something of the more active operations in which we were about to engage, I shall recount two or three little incidents not described in my general account of our movements and performances.

In my account of the battle on April 6, I mentioned that a number of men had been buried by shell explosions or otherwise put out of action without having sustained an open wound. Of these there was one to whom the much-abused term "shell-shock" could properly be applied. Often the term was used to describe a condition that was nothing but terror. However, there was a *true* condition of shell shock, but this in my experience never occurred in the case of cowards. Quite the reverse. The victims were men of finest moral courage. This combined with a high sense of duty and a lively imagination set the stage for the development of shell-shock. The man's whole physical nature revolted from the sights and sounds of a bombardment. This was much intensified if he was with troops holding a static position and obliged to sit still and take punishment without the opportunity of striking back. The thoughts and the sights of jagged pieces of steel tearing through living human flesh were appalling. All the man's natural physical impulses prompted him to take shelter, and to run away if necessary. On the other hand his spiritual courage, his faith to his duty and his discipline forced him to remain. The result was a conflict under which the nervous system collapsed and the soldier became a gibbering maniac. The man I speak of was of this type. I did not write his name in my diary but I still remember it after nearly 20 years. When he was brought into our dugout we placed him sitting on a bench and facing the entrance. I do not think that he had the slightest idea of where he was or of what he was doing.

We were busy dressing others of the wounded, the shell-shock case in the meantime sitting perfectly still and looking with a fixed gaze towards the door. Suddenly without warning he gave utterance to a high-pitched wailing cry which he kept up without cessation. He was not weeping; he had no tears in his eyes; but his fearful cry denoted terrible mental anguish; and never in my life have I heard other sounds that filled me with such horror and dismay. We placed him on a stretcher, gave him

enough morphine to assuage his sufferings and sent him out to the field ambulance at the first opportunity.

Later on in the month this unfortunate returned to the unit when we were in one of the reserve camps west of Dickebusch. He came to see me and frankly explained his condition of which I was well aware. I really did not know what to do with the man, for I felt that he was through so far as usefulness in the front line was concerned. I thought of sending him to remain at the horse or transport lines for a time, but he solved my difficulty for me. I spoke kindly to the boy and asked him if he thought he could really stand the gaff any longer. "I do not know, Sir," he replied. "but I want a chance to try; I may break down again or I may get a 'Blighty' but I'm not going to quit."

Two companies moved up to Voormezeele that night. The one this boy was with slept in lean-to shelters along the remains of the convent wall near the entrance of Convent Lane, our communication trench. Before the men settled for the night a shell made a direct hit on the hut where the boy slept and the poor fellow never had his opportunity to prove that he could overcome shell-shock.

Another case, one of sickness, had a happier sequel. One evening just as we had fallen in for a march to the trenches, Kelter, a member of C Company, paraded sick. This was at the time of which I have spoken when nearly all the men were in poor physical condition. Kelter was certainly ill, but little worse than many who were carrying on. I took the trouble to explain the situation to him; that we were holding the line with a tired battalion much reduced in numbers, and that if the enemy should happen to attack we would need every available rifle. At the same time I told him, if when he reached the line he found himself getting worse, to obtain permission to report to me in Voormezeele. Kelter understood the condition of affairs and agreed to carry on as long as possible. He went up to the front trench with his company, and within two hours was back at the Regimental Aid Post in Voormezeele, shot through the lungs. A rifle or machine gun bullet had passed transversely through his chest. I feared that both lungs were wounded and that he would be drowned in his own blood which was coming from his mouth. Altogether I thought that this was a poor reward for his plucky attempt to keep going.

However the injury must have been confined to one lung, otherwise I do not see how he could have recovered. It so happened that a motor ambulance was standing in the street. We placed Kelter within and I ordered the driver to not stop at the Advanced Dressing Station at

Dickebusch but to drive straight on to the Casualty Clearing Station at Poperinghe. I had no news of Kelter until the end of the war – we seldom had in such cases – but the day after I came home to Calgary in June, 1919, I met Kelter on the street, looking hale and hearty. If he were half as pleased to see me as I was to meet him I must have had a warm welcome home.

Another incident is connected with the Advanced Dressing Station in the *laiterie* (creamery) in Dickebusch. Captain Hardisty of the 6th Field Ambulance was in charge at the time and told the story. It concerned a fine unit of our brigade, the 29th Battalion, of which Captain McDiarmid was the extremely capable medical officer. He possessed the full confidence and respect of the men. One evening when the Battalion was on its way to the front one of the men became ill and fell out in the village of Dickebusch. He reported to Captain Hardisty at the *laiterie*. The man was ill but not too helpless to carry on.

“But my dear fellow,” said Hardisty, “you are not sick enough for admission to hospital under ordinary circumstances, and if I admit you now your unit will not know what has become of you. You may be posted as a casualty, missing. Why didn’t you report to the battalion medical officer when you became ill?”

The answer came pat. “I didn’t feel ill until the battalion was moving off, and by that time the medical officer had gone on up to Voormezeele to take over.”

“Well, why not report to your own M.O. as you pass through Voormezeele on your way up?”

“That would hardly do, Sir, for I should have to go on into the trenches and report to my platoon sergeant.”

“Then do that,” said Hardisty, “and have the sergeant give you a note with permission to return to the Regimental Aid Post.”

The man considered a moment before replying; “Well, to tell you the honest truth, so help me God! Sir, there’s no point in going to our medical officer unless the blood’s running out of you.”

XIII THE BATTLE OF SANCTUARY WOOD¹

Are you not moved, when all the sway of earth
Shakes like a thing unfirm? O Cicero,
I have seen tempests, when the scolding winds
Have rived the knotty oaks; and I have seen
Th'ambitious ocean swell and rage and foam,
To be exalted with the threat'ning clouds.
But never till to-night, never till now
Did I go through a tempest dropping fire.
Either there is civil strife in heaven,
Or else the world, too saucy with the gods,
Incenses them to send destruction.

– Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act I, Scene III

I shall now return to Camp H where, on June 1, I held sick parade at 2 p.m. on a fine summer afternoon. The next day in the afternoon we could hear the sound of intense artillery fire towards the front beyond Ypres. This continued throughout the night and was particularly noticeable in the early morning of June 3. At the time we did not know the significance of the sound or of what it was to mean to us within a few hours. The 4th of June, was a Sunday, a fine day so far as the weather was concerned, but bad news came thick and fast. At almost the same time we received the news of the naval battle of Jutland and that the 3rd Canadian Division had been heavily attacked in the tip of the Ypres Salient.² It will be recalled that the first tidings of the Battle of Jutland

¹ More commonly referred to now as the Battle of Mount Sorrel. – P B.

² McGill to Emma Griffis, 16 June 1916. In closing his letter to Emma, Harold gave a graphic account of how his cousin was thought to have died during the fighting at Zillebeke. "My cousin who was medical officer with one of the units in the 3rd Division Canadians was killed on June 2 when the Germans opened their first attack on our lines. He was cut off in his aid post and made a fight for it until all his pistol cartridges were fired when the Germans killed him with bombs." Captain Walter Reuben

were rather disturbing.³ We also learned that in stemming the enemy attack at Armagh and Sanctuary Woods the 3rd Division had suffered very severe casualties.⁴ The Divisional Commander, General Mercer, had been killed.

In the course of the day our 2nd Division received orders to relieve the 3rd Division in the Zillebeke-Hooge sector east of Ypres. In the meantime, I made a medical inspection of a reinforcement draft at 10 p.m. and found several medically unfit, and gave a lecture on first aid to the machine gun section at 2 p.m. That evening the battalion made a short march to a camp in the 3rd Divisional area. A number of the company officers went up to the front to secure information regarding the front that we were to take over. Lieutenant Downie, our machine gun officer, was shot through the leg. Rain came on with the darkness.

The morning of June 5 was cool with a strong southwest wind. The 6th Brigade had orders to relieve the 7th Brigade in the Zillebeke-Hooge sector that night with the 31st Battalion in the front line. During the day I cleared all my sick and made an inspection of the stretcher bearers' equipment and supplies as I always did before going into a general action. Our officers messed with the officers of the camp where we were temporarily billeted. I remember I matched coins with Lieutenant Bateman to find out which of us should pay for the two dinners. I forget who won, but it was Bateman's last dinner. He was killed before the night was over.⁵

At 7:30 p.m. the battalion left in motor buses and lorries for Ypres. Corporal Bright and I went with the main body while I sent Willis and

Wigmore Haight was, in fact, taken prisoner on June 2. His C.E.F. records show that he was interned at four different camps in Germany, in one of which he contracted dysentery in 1917. Upon repatriation to England in February of 1918 Captain Haight was admitted to the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital at Millbank for assessment of the gunshot wounds to his penis and continuing urination problems. He had lost 20 pounds and was suffering from malnutrition and fatigue. After two months' medical leave, he returned to duty in England.

3 The Germans sank the Royal Navy battle cruisers *Invincible*, *Indefatigable*, and *Queen Mary*, three smaller armoured cruisers and several lesser ships.

4 Two of the 3rd Division's three brigades were severely mauled, several battalions being all but wiped out. – P B.

5 Lieut. Charles Arthur Bateman, killed in action, June 6, 1916. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 40. Lieut. Bateman was killed during a heavy bombardment while enroute to relieving the 60th Battalion. Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 106.

my batman with the transport to look after our medical kit and personal baggage. From Ypres the battalion moved by foot overland towards the front. Bright and I attached ourselves to A Company which was in advance. The transport passed through Ypres and eastward through the Menin Gate and along the Menin road to Hellfire Corner. Here it turned to the south and proceeded to Ration Dump, a few hundred yards north of the village of Zillebeke. This was the point at which I had arranged to meet Willis and pick up my supplies.

The company marched forward, and as we crossed the Zillebeke road and advanced towards Yeomanry Post where the Battalion Headquarters was, we could discern on all sides of us, even in the darkness, the signs of the recent heavy fighting. We had to step carefully to avoid falling into fresh shell holes. Dead bodies, rifles and discarded equipment littered the ground in every direction. I had once seen a team of horses run away with a wagonload of sheaves. The battlefield reminded me of the harvest field after the run-away team had passed over it, scattering wheat sheaves. Only here, the sheaves were represented by dead soldiers and the field was pock-marked with fresh shell holes.

Just before we reached Yeomanry Post the enemy burst two shrapnel shells over us, beautifully timed and placed, which inflicted eight casualties. The German gunners could not have known we were there but if they had been shooting over open sights in daylight they could not have placed their bursts more effectively. No one was mortally wounded. Among those hit were Lieutenant Wolley-Dod, with a broken forearm, and Sergeant Angus, shot through the foot. The company moved on to its assigned position, and for a time I was kept busy attending to the wounded. The area was swept by machine gun bullets, and we had additional casualties from these.

When Bright and I had finished dressing the casualties, we went to Headquarters and took shelter in the trenches thereabout. I had been informed by Brigade that there was a suitable site for the Regimental Aid Post at a place called Dormy House. I tried to find a guide to take me there, for I knew only its map location. I was unable to secure one, and just at midnight when Bright and I were about to climb out of the trench and start off by ourselves, the enemy began a furious bombardment and machine gun fire on the area. Before this, the air had seemed to be full of bullets like a swarm of bees, but now they came literally in sheets, and an attempt to walk overland would have been a short route to suicide. We lay low in the trench for an hour, until 1 a.m., and then departed to keep our tryst with Willis at Ration Dump near Zillebeke.

We found Willis and the orderly patiently waiting for us, and we all went down into the village where we found the aid post of the 43rd Battalion but the place was too small for more than one medical officer and his men to work in, and was practically devoid of protection. Rain was leaking through the roof. I encountered Lieutenant Herb Whittaker of the 3rd Division whom I had known in Calgary. He offered to take us up to Dormy House and we started off. We found the place without difficulty but we were no further ahead. There was a good cellar, but this was already fully occupied by signallers and machine gunners. A communication trench ran parallel to the road up which we had travelled, and as we were returning the Huns began to hammer this trench with salvos of 15-cm shells, four at a time. A full battery had evidently been turned on. On seeing this I hesitated to advance but Whittaker was quite confident.

"Come on," he said, "they are firing at the communication trench; the road is perfectly safe." He had scarcely spoken when one, two, three, four, another salvo came, most of them detonating on the road right in front of us.

"You may be right, Herb," I said, "but this looks to me like a good place to leave, and there is no time like the present."

At that Bright, Willis and I cut into the field to our right, away from the trench, and when other salvos came we took shelter in shell holes of which there was no lack. Whittaker walked straight on into the village quite undeterred by the shells. The rest of us came out at Ration Dump on the Zillebeke Road where we had left our kit supplies. These we packed down to the 43rd Battalion aid post. By this time it was breaking day. We turned in and helped to dress the wounded who were arriving. The stream ceased at sunrise. Two ambulance cars of the 10th Field Ambulance took the last of the wounded away in broad daylight within full view of the enemy.

During all this time I was in considerable trouble of mind. I knew that we must be having casualties; yet during the night I had seen only one of our units since leaving Yeomanry Post. The place where we had been expected to go was unavailable, and the wounded would not know where to find me. The 10th Field Ambulance had an Advanced Dressing Station on the Ypres-Menin road and I concluded that our casualties must be going out that way. Of course it did not matter where or by whom the wounded were attended, but a medical officer always wished to see those from his own unit if possible.

Before making a definite move I decided to pay a visit to the dugouts at the west end of Zillebeke Lake where the 9th Field Ambulance had an Advanced Dressing Station. The enemy was still shelling, and as I walked along the shore some of the shells were falling in the lake, sending up great spouts of water. I found three medical officers at the station, called Zillebeke Bund. As not many wounded were coming in I concluded that my services were not required there. I met Major McIntosh of Medicine Hat, formerly of our unit, but now with the 3rd Division signallers. He told me that Lieutenant Bateman of B Company had been killed going into the trenches the night before.

All afternoon, from 1:00 until 4:00 p.m. there was a deafening roar of artillery from both sides, all the guns being apparently in full action. The village of Zillebeke was heavily shelled and several men killed. The Regimental Aid Post fortunately escaped destruction. Captain Dalphe of the 9th Field Ambulance came up in the evening to assist Captain Chisholm, the 43rd Battalion M.O. I decided to move back to the Ypres-Menin road and establish our aid post there. Our wounded were evidently going out that way, and there seemed to be no suitable place available nearer the line. During the evening I dressed six 31st Battalion men in Zillebeke. I learned that the Germans had made a determined infantry attack during the afternoon after springing a mine under a platoon of the 28th Battalion at Hooge. The attack had been heavily repulsed all along the line. One of our machine gun crews located at a culvert on the Menin road had good shooting that afternoon. They had a Colt gun⁶ which for a wonder did not jam. The crew fired over 4,000 rounds with a living target all the time.

After dark we all moved back to the Menin Mill and opened an aid post in a solidly constructed empty building on the south side of the Menin road, not far from the 10th Field Ambulance Advanced Dressing Station. Although it was farther back from the line than we would have wished, it suited our purposes admirably and was well placed to intercept the backward flowing stream of casualties. By 11 p.m. we were in our new quarters ready for business. When we took over the only

6 In another of Sam Hughes' less wise moves, the C.E.F. was originally equipped with the American-made Colt machine gun rather than the much more reliable British Vickers model. The former, finally replaced in 1916, had developed a reputation for unreliability in action second only to the infamous Ross rifle. – P B.

occupant of the building was a German prisoner who had received a bayonet thrust, one of the few bayonet wounds I saw during the war. He could speak no English, and his sole repeated reply to anything said to him was, "Je ne comprend pas." Evidently he thought we should know French even if we did not understand German.

In the latter part of May Captain McDiarmid the medical officer of the 29th Battalion had received an injury and had been replaced temporarily by Captain Kennedy of the 6th Field Ambulance. During this eventful day Kennedy had experienced much the same difficulty that I had encountered. For a time he was well forward at a place called the Chinese Wall. However, he had no proper place in which to work and found that the stream of casualties was flowing past him. About midnight he arrived with his orderlies at our post and we agreed to join forces. Kennedy was very tired, and as he sat in the room he expressed a wish for an opportunity to exchange all his worldly possessions for a drink of Scotch.

"Would you really like a drink of Scotch, Kennedy?" I asked.

Kennedy looked at me in a mildly reproving sort of way as if to say "Why jest under such circumstances as these?"

Now it so happened that in all my wanderings during the preceding 24 hours I had been carrying a full bottle of Scotch whisky in my pack. Now I thought was the time, if ever, when one might invoke the aid of spirituous substance, and, thrusting my hand into the pack, I produced the bottle. Kennedy's eyes nearly popped out of his head.

"My God!" he said. "which side of the lamp do you rub?"

For a time we did not have many wounded; as we had just opened for business. However there were plenty arriving at the Advanced Dressing Station, and for a period I did a shift of work attending casualties there, a number of whom came from the 31st Battalion.

During the night of June 7 we passed through a number of severely wounded, but by 4 a.m. the stream had ceased to flow. In the course of the afternoon I walked down to Brigade Headquarters, in the old ramparts of Ypres. On my way into the city I crossed the old moat and entered by the famous Menin Gate. The Germans were sending over some of their high-bursting shells which arrived with a roar like an engine and burst with a shattering explosion and a cloud of black smoke. As I entered the city the enemy was bursting these over the gate, but with no appreciable result.

During the night of June 7-8 we were busy from 1:30 to 5 a.m. attending wounded, mostly severe stretcher cases. We continued to clear

wounded until sunrise. The day came out clear with a west wind still blowing. I walked down into Ypres again in the evening. At 9 p.m. there was a heavy rain. That night when our transport came up with rations we sent most of our medical kit back to the horse lines, retaining only what was immediately necessary, for we knew that we could draw upon the field ambulances when we required additional supplies. During the night of June 8–9 the 27th Battalion relieved the 31st, and our unit moved into Ypres. I remained in the aid post all night and rejoined my battalion the following morning. I remember that Kirk Owen, afterwards promoted to a commission, allotted me my billet in a deserted and partially wrecked house. When I rejoined the battalion I arranged for a sick parade for the afternoon of June 9, and saw a few wounded that had not reported during the heat of the action. The day was fine with occasional showers of rain.

The next day I sent out three slightly wounded, that had not reported previously, in order that they might be inoculated against tetanus. Lieutenant Pinkham reported with a rupture of an ear drum caused by the concussion of a shell explosion. During the day I took advantage of a little spare time to wander about the city of Ypres and see the points of interest including the ruins of the famous Cloth Hall. While picking a few roses in a little garden I nearly bumped into the muzzle of a field gun that was thrusting its snout out of a clump of shrubbery in which it was concealed. One of the roses I picked in the garden of Ypres I sent back to Canada, and it is still preserved among my few souvenirs of the war.⁷

By nightfall on June 11 the 31st Battalion had moved into the front line. I took over the Regimental Aid Post at the Menin Mill at 9 p.m., but as we had plenty of room, Captain Butters, the medical officer of the 27th Battalion did not leave until the following morning. We cleared a number of severely wounded stretcher cases during the night. None was from the 31st Battalion. The artillery on both sides fired full blast all night. As for our side, the guns were preparing for an infantry attack by the 1st Canadian Division in the early hours of June 13. We made as complete preparations as we could for the inevitable casualties. Among the measures taken was the conversion of a quantity of our morphine tablets into a more readily available form. We had saved up a number of empty vaccine bottles. These we sterilized and filled with a standardized

7 The rose was sent to Calgary nurse Emma Griffis. McGill to Emma Griffis, 16 June 1916.

solution of morphine – one grain to the fluid dram. We closed the mouths of the bottles with rubber membrane so that one could thrust the needle of a hypodermic syringe through the membrane and fill the syringe without opening the bottle and contaminating the contents. A syringe full of the solution represented half a grain of morphine. We prepared and kept ready a supply of sterilized needles.

At 11 p.m. June 12, the weather was exceedingly disagreeable, more like October than June. It was raining steadily with a high, cold west wind. The artillery maintained full pressure all afternoon. With the onset of darkness casualties began to arrive. A Company reported two killed and 16 wounded.

Now began the hardest and longest tour of sustained duty that I experienced during the war. We began work at dusk, June 12, worked without break or rest throughout the night, all the following day and through the second night until the early hours of June 14, when the stream of casualties began to slacken and diminish in volume.⁸ We were never without wounded. As fast as a man could be dressed and the stretcher removed, another took his place. Fortunately the motor ambulances could drive right up to the door, and there was no delay in clearing our wounded. We had no regular meals, but ate standing up when we were hungry, and there was always an abundance of hot cocoa and coffee available whenever we felt like taking a cup. The field ambulance ran a sandwich and coffee stand next door to our aid post and thus rendered invaluable service throughout the action. The relentless rain never seemed to diminish in the slightest. All of the stretcher cases were soaked to the skin and plastered with mud. In many instances we cut the clothing completely away and wrapped the patients in blankets.

Luckily we had ample space in our post, and were able to keep the wounded sheltered from the weather while they were waiting for the ambulance cars to take them away. It was astonishing for one to see the change for the better in the wounded after we dressed their wounds, wrapped them in dry warm blankets and filled their stomachs with food and readily available hot drinks. The orderlies kept a succession of blankets heating over the primus stoves. We gave morphine freely.

8 On June 13, the Canadian Corps launched a well-prepared counterattack which regained most of the ground lost to the Germans on June 2–3. Total Canadian casualties between June 2 and 14 were nearly 8,000, the heaviest the Corps had suffered in any battle up to that time. – P B.

Of course many of the poor fellows that were brought in were beyond any hope of resuscitation because of the severity of their wounds. In a number of cases it seemed too bad that other men should have been placed in danger in order to carry them to the dressing station. In one instance three out of four of the carrying party were wounded in bringing a man a long distance through the rain and mud. The casualty on the stretcher was stone dead when the party reached the aid post.

As to the weather, the night was just such a one as when King Lear was out of doors. The rain fell in buckets, driven by a wind that was almost a gale. Whether the thunder and lightening described in Lear were present or not, I cannot say. If so, their effect was completely submerged by the continuous flashes and roar of our artillery. About 1:30 a.m., June 13, the noise of the artillery seemed to have risen to a sustained climax. Usually in an action the medical officer and his aid post were well forward of the guns. On this occasion we were right among them, behind the field guns and in front of the heavy howitzers.

The enemy in his counter-battery⁹ attempts shelled within a few feet of the back door of the house where we were. Several heavy shells exploded in the garden. We knew that we were receiving attention, for we could feel our building rock and sway with each shell explosion, but the noise of the explosion was completely drowned out by the sounds of our own guns. I heard afterwards that our heavy artillery had planted 1,200 twelve-inch shells in the German line before the attack was launched. I do not know whether or not this was the number, but do know that it was a busy night for the gunners. With the coming of the day the artillery bombardment abated somewhat, but the wind and rain continued and the wounded still came. By noon those arriving were nearly all from the 1st and 3rd Brigades of the 1st Division.

A number of German prisoners were also included among the wounded we cared for. An officer casualty from the 1st Division told me that they had received orders not to waste time with prisoners until they had reached their final objective. Hence the appearance of prisoners indicated that their final objective had been reached, which was indeed the case. However, a number of our wounded were reported as still lying in the front line. Long after daylight the ammunition limbers continued to race past our door towards the front. A view down the street towards

9 "Counter-battery" refers to the practice of specifically shelling the enemy's artillery, literally heavy gun battery against heavy gun battery. – P B.

Hellfire Corner presented a strange sight. The road was strewn with green branches as though a festival procession of some kind had passed by. Shells had stripped these branches from the trees along the roadside.

For the three hours prior to 1 a.m., June 14, there had been a steady procession of stretcher cases. The walking wounded had pretty well all passed through, but the stretcher cases continued to come. By noon the rain had ceased, but the weather was still cloudy and cold with a strong wind. The artillery had been fairly quiet throughout the night, but at 2:30 in the afternoon the guns began to awaken again, and the sun made feeble attempts to shine. At 9:00 that night Captain Butters came to take over the Regimental Aid Post. Our unit was being relieved by the 27th Battalion and was moving back to Ypres. As wounded were still coming in I remained for the night. At 12:30 p.m. the next day I left by the Menin road for Ypres where I held sick parade in the afternoon, and sent several minor casualties to the 10th Field Ambulance for anti-tetanus serum.

The 6th Brigade was under orders to move back to the Reninghelst area after being relieved by a brigade of the Guards Division that night. The greater portion of the battalion was moved by motor buses back to Camp H, near Reninghelst. As we proceeded westward on the Ypres-Vlamertinghe road we passed long strings of heavy howitzers being drawn by caterpillar tractors proceeding in the same direction. These were the guns that had blasted through the road for the infantry attack, two nights before. I presume that they were on their way to take part in the great battle of the Somme that was soon to begin. All this was, of course, after nightfall.

I arrived at Camp H at midnight. During the next few days we had a chance to review the results of our two tours of duty in the front line. In the action, I attended 135 casualties belonging to 26 different units. It so happened that the 31st Battalion was in the line for both general actions; that of the German attack on June 6, and for the counter-attack on June 13. The total 31st Battalion casualties in the two actions, both defensive so far as our unit was concerned, amounted to one officer (Lieutenant Bateman) and 43 other ranks killed, in addition to eight officers and 173 N.C.O.s and men wounded.

XIV THE SUMMER IN BELGIUM

'Tis a brave army,
And full of purpose.

– Shakespeare, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, Act IV, Scene III

On June 20 we moved into brigade reserve in Voormezele and Scottish Wood where we took over from the King's Shropshire Light Infantry, the same unit we had relieved at Spoil Bank on April 3 before our crater fight at St. Eloi. As the same Colonel was in command, I took occasion to ask him about Parsons, the machine gunner who had been in the trenches for so long at St. Eloi, and who had come out with us. Parsons, of whom I have already spoken, had impressed me as being a particularly fine sort of chap, and I was sorry to have the Colonel tell me that the boy had been killed a short time before.¹ The most cruel and depressing thing about war is the way it seems to pick the bravest and best for sacrifice. "Death loves a shining mark."

The day following, our headquarters and two companies moved back to billets in Dickebusch, and the two forward companies in Voormezele came back to Scottish Wood. June 22 was fine with a southwest wind, and there was much airplane activity. One of our planes was shot down in an air fight near Ypres. We had a man killed on a work party that night and a scout wounded. I must explain that the newly established system of working parties applied only to the units in divisional reserve where a permanent work party now relieved them of this duty. In the forward areas, the battalions furnished work parties at night but the men did not have to march for miles to reach their work.

We had no casualties on work parties for two nights, but when the enemy shelled the Wood freely with shrapnel during the morning of June 25, one of the men received a slight scalp wound. During the afternoon of June 27 I went up to the front and visited Bus House Trench in our system of support trenches. Artillery was fairly active, and at midnight our guns put on a heavy bombardment. We had a man in the work party

1 Probably Lance Sergeant George Parsons, King's Shropshire Light Infantry, killed in action, April 25, 1916, age 21.

slightly wounded by shrapnel. The 25th Battalion relieved us on the night of June 28 and we moved back to E Camp. All four companies in the unit were together again.

July 1 was bright and fine. We made a holiday of it, far away from Canada as we were. At 10:00 in the morning we were inspected by the General of Division, and in the afternoon the unit took part in an athletic meet of the 6th Brigade. Also, in the course of the afternoon we heard our first news of the great battle of the Somme that had been launched that morning. That night we heard heavy artillery fire in the direction of Kemmel at 10 p.m.

The first few days of July were warm and fine, enabling the men to obtain a little much-needed comfort and rest. As an expression of their contentment they indulged in singing to a much greater extent than had been the case a few weeks earlier in the season. I can recall, though, that one of the songs we frequently heard at this time was the one containing that mournful refrain:

“Oh my! I don’t want to die;
I want to go home.”

The fine weather broke with a heavy thunderstorm on the afternoon of July 4. That night our unit relieved the 18th Battalion in the Bluff sector, our right flank resting on the Ypres-Comines canal which separated our front from the one we held when we first moved into the Salient on April 3. We left camp in the rain at 6:30 p.m. and by then the roads were very muddy and the marching conditions bad. It was 2:00 in the morning before the relief was complete and the men were very tired after the long march. One was wounded on the way in. Our Regimental Aid Post, situated to the north of, and across the canal from Spoil Bank, where our post had been in early April, was at the foot of a considerable hill. Since our last occupation the engineers had driven tunnels into the hill and these were lighted by electricity. I do not know the reason why our aid post was not in one of these for they furnished good protection against shell fire.

During the day I sent out several sick and wounded to Bedford House. At 5:40 p.m. Lieutenant Richards was shot through the head and killed by a sniper while he was walking along the trench.² Richards was a fine

2 Lieut. Joseph Vanston Richards, killed in action, July 5, 1916. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 636.

soldier, but was older by far than any of the subalterns now that Tofft had passed on. He was not supple enough to readily adopt the usual posture when passing quickly through shallow trenches. Besides, he was over six feet in height. As he passed a portion of the trench where the parapet was low an enemy sniper took advantage of the instant that his head was exposed. Richards was very popular throughout the unit. He had been away from the battalion quite a bit, for we often selected him for courses and special duties behind the lines, feeling that his age and fine soldiership entitled him to any little indulgences that might be available. I always thought that he resented this little indication of favour. He was too keen a soldier to desire "Bomb-proof" duty, and always returned to his unit as soon as possible. He had been back from one of these absences only a short time when he met his death. We all felt depressed at this, what we regarded as an avoidable event.

On July 6 we sent out a man with a rifle grenade wound of the arm, and a sick man belonging to No. 1 Tunneling Company. July 7 was cloudy with a south wind and showers of rain fell at intervals. The gas alert was on. The front line was very quiet. At 2:00 on the morning of July 8, I sent out a man of the 6th Field Company of Engineers with a bullet wound of the shoulder. The day came out bright and clear with a southwest wind and the enemy aeroplanes were very busy. In the afternoon the Germans threw over a number of shells, but none came near our aid post. At midnight our guns put on a heavy bombardment of the German line in front of the 1st Division which was on our left. The enemy replied vigorously. During the night of July 8–9 we cleared nine casualties, three of whom were stretcher cases. During the evening of July 9, the enemy subjected the 1st Division front to an intense bombardment. Our artillery retaliated, the guns behind us shooting to the left flank.

July 10 began with a clear hot morning and a southwest wind. During the night we had sent out a casualty from the 28th Battalion whose life had been saved by a polished steel mirror in his left breast pocket. This had deflected the bullet which otherwise would have pierced his heart. The sheet of metal was bent at an angle and the man had a severe bruise over the left breast. During the day I sent out a number of sick with trench fever.³ This was now a well-recognized malady. The contagion

3 Leading symptoms: (i) low fever, temperature 99–101, (ii) severe headache, (iii) gastric disturbance, (iv) general myalgia. War Diary of M.O. 31st (Alberta) Battalion C.E.F., 10 July 1916. Harold and Emma McGill, f. 742, Glenbow Archives.

was conveyed by body lice, and certainly the means of spreading the infection were not wanting in this part of the line. It is strange how one is able to accustom himself to the inevitable. There had been a time in ante-bellum days when the thought of lice on my person would have filled me with disgust and loathing. Now, when everyone in the line was lousy, more or less, the condition was accepted as a matter of course. The day closed with the sound of artillery firing in the direction of Ypres.

The weather remained fine and warm. Private Lovell of A Company was killed on the night of July 10–11 in much the same manner as Lieutenant Richards, except that it was a chance machine gun bullet that hit him.⁴ He was on sentry go, and while looking over the parapet, was caught by a burst of fire. It was not a case of a sniper at work because the night was dark.

At this time there were rumours current of a contemplated attack by our division on the St. Eloi mound, the scene of the fighting in early April. This attack never came off and perhaps it was as well for us that it did not, for the mound would have been overlooked and dominated by the Germans holding the higher ground in front and to the right flank. In any case Lieut.-Colonel Bell and I took advantage of the quiet afternoon of July 11 and examined the ground to the rear of the sector to our right, south of the canal. We were out to locate a suitable forward position for a battle headquarters and aid post in the event of a general attack being ordered. We didn't find a place that we considered suitable, but I remember that we came across a Deering mower standing in a field.

Between 6:00 and 8:00 in the evening I made a round of our own front line, visiting the advanced bombing posts in the crater on the Bluff, a piece of high ground adjoining the canal. We were now holding the famous International of which I have spoken before. We knew that the enemy had a mine under a section of this trench, and as a consequence we felt far from comfortable. The mined position was well known and feared in the Ypres Salient, for both sides desired possession of the Bluff.

An incident worth relating occurred about this time, when another battalion was holding the position. Our people had received word – from a deserter probably – that the enemy planned to spring the mine at midnight of a certain date. Here was a difficulty. If the garrison were

4 Pte. Leonard Lovell, killed in action, July 10, 1916, age 33. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 443.

withdrawn the enemy could come over and occupy the trench without loss. On the other hand, if the men were left in position, heavy losses would certainly be inflicted upon us if the enemy exploded the mine. This was the solution. The greater part of the force was withdrawn into the support trenches, but a sacrifice patrol of a corporal and four machine gunners was left to hold off the attack until our men could come into position or occupy the crater if the mine was sprung. The members of the machine gun crew knew the exact meaning of what was expected of them, but they took up their position without a word, and held it until after the fatal hour of midnight. Fortunately the Huns did not fire their mine on that occasion. They did so later on, but that is another story. The corporal told me afterwards that he was very appreciative of Fritz's change in program.

July 12 was another bad day for us. Our scout officer, Lieutenant Campbell, a very promising young man, was killed while patrolling in No Man's Land.⁵ During the afternoon I made another tour of the front line. The 28th Battalion relieved us that night, the relief being completed at 12:15 a.m., July 13, whereupon we moved back to Micmac Camp behind Dickebusch. The week had been rather expensive in casualties for what was known as a period of "peace." We cleared 28 wounded through our aid post, some of whom were from other units. Our own losses were two officers and two men killed, and 20 men wounded. One of the latter was soon after reported dead of wounds.

I made a medical inspection of a reinforcement draft of 200 men at 10:45 on the morning of July 14. Their physical condition was good. The few days following were bright and warm, and the battalion took advantage of the favourable weather conditions to clean up and refit. In the afternoon of July 21 we moved to Durham Camp near La Clytte. During the move three cooks were wounded by shrapnel burst over the road. At 10 p.m. I took over the aid post located in the brasserie on the Ypres-Kemmel road south of Scottish Wood. We had one killed and one wounded during the night.

The next afternoon I paid a visit to the front line. The enemy was throwing over trench mortar bombs or "Rum Jars." We had several wounded, one of them belonging to the siege gun⁶ battery. This man's injuries were severe. At midnight there was a sound of heavy artillery

5 Lieut. Duncan John McLean Campbell, killed in action, July 11, 1916, age 20. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 111.

6 Siege guns were the largest calibre artillery the army possessed.

firing from far in the south. We cleared only one wounded during the night.

July 23 was fine with a northwest wind. In the afternoon the enemy gave our front line a scourging with trench mortar bombs and 15-cm shells. The 24th Battalion relieved us that night and we moved back to Ontario Camp which we reached at 2 a.m. The name of R. G. Flemons, one of my stretcher bearers, appeared in battalion orders that day. He had been granted the military medal for gallant conduct during our Ypres show in the beginning of June.

After dark in the evening of July 25 we heard a heavy bombardment in the direction of the Bluff. I cannot say for certain that this was the date chosen by the Germans to spring their mine in that sector but have the impression that it was. Our forces were in luck; they suffered few casualties, and were able to occupy the crater and consolidate the position.

A story, whether true or not, was current afterwards. It was to the effect that the German signal for the attack happened to be the same as our S.O.S. for the same night. The result was that when our gunners saw the signal lights go up, green and red flares, or whatever they were, they immediately laid down a barrage on the German line with the result that the attacking force was destroyed before it started.

On July 27 the whole unit went for a 12-mile route march. It was a hot, close day, but the outing was a pleasant change from trench duty. We halted near Mont des Cats at noon to have our lunch. The battalion returned to camp in good shape with very few men complaining of sore feet. At 7 a.m., two days later, we went with the entire 6th Brigade on another long route march through back country, on another hot day. We halted for a picnic lunch at 2 p.m. Our battalion reached camp at 3:30 without having had a single man fall out. This sort of thing reminded us of our training in England the summer before. Also the whisper began to go about that our division was booked for the Somme, where an almost continuous battle was in progress.

At this period of the war we were greatly elated over the reported great victories of Brusilov, the famous Russian general.⁷ It was said that

7 In order to relieve pressure on the Italians at Trentino General Alexei Alexeievich Brusilov, Commander of the Russian Army on the Southern Front, launched a sudden attack on the Austrian front on June 4. Brusilov surprised the enemy by launching his four armies along a wide front; ordering an unexpectedly brief bombardment directed

some of our troops were in the habit of placing the news of these great victories on big placards and exhibiting them to the enemy opposite our trenches. Finally – so the story goes – the Germans became incensed at this gratuitous news service and came back with a large sign-board bearing the legend: “England expects every Russian and Frenchman to do his duty.”

The last day of July was hot and clear. I inspected the men of a reinforcement draft in the afternoon. At night we relieved the 20th Battalion in the St. Eloï sector, where at 10 p.m., I took over the old Voormezele aid post for the last time. August set in with very hot weather. On the night of the 1st, Sergeant-Major Colson of C Company was killed while out with a patrol in No Man’s Land.⁸ During the afternoon of August 2, I visited the front trenches and the Voormezele Switch. The enemy was using trench mortars freely. That evening I brought two of my water squad down from the horse lines to superintend the sterilization of the water which was being obtained from a well in Voormezele and carried to the front line in petrol tins. We passed through a number of wounded, one of them with a shattered left foot and a severe wound of the right leg. In the early morning of August 4 Lieutenant Sara went through our post with a serious bullet wound of the face. I visited the front line during the day and that evening the Battalion Headquarters was shelled, with no resulting casualties. We had no wounded through our aid post during the night of August 4–5, but a man of the 25th Battalion died on his way to the post. The following afternoon I visited the front line and support trenches. After dark the enemy trench mortars were very active. At midnight, four badly wounded men were brought in from a 24th Battalion working party. They had all been wounded by the same shell.

On August 7 I visited the front and support trenches. A raiding party from A Company was to make an attempt to enter Crater 5 at 11 p.m. so I sent extra dressings, splints, etc., to the front line. The raiding party encountered a German patrol in No Man’s Land, and the raid ended

mainly at enemy installations; and using curtain fire during the advance to trap the Austrians in their trenches. Within the month, Brusilov’s army had pressed the Austrian Army back nearly sixty miles. Anthony Livesey, *Great Battles of World War I* (Toronto: Strathearn Books, 1997), 96–97.

8 CSM Henry Colson, MM, killed in action, August 1, 1916, age 30. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 146. Colson and Corporal Cameron were attacked while approaching the body of a German soldier to obtain his identity badges. Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 121.

in a bomb fight. By 4:00 in the morning on August 8 we had passed through all the casualties, 14 in number. Most of them had sustained multiple painful bomb wounds, requiring large quantities of dressing material, but not necessarily dangerous. The day came out clear and hot with a northeast wind. In the afternoon I visited the support trenches and the Voormezele Switch.

I have recorded quite a number of visits to the front line during the past two tours of duty in the trenches, and for good reason. During the previous winter in front of Kemmel it had been my custom to make such visits almost daily, but the practice was not encouraged by the higher command. I recall meeting General Turner one day in the G trenches. He spoke to me in his usual kindly manner as to the purpose of my visit, and his comment carried an implied admonition concerning the wisdom and utility of such visits. However, in July we received direct orders when we were in the Bluff sector to make such visits daily, or as often as was possible. The battalion medical officers made every endeavour to comply with the terms of the order, although we were reminded of a story that appeared in *Punch* about that period. The hero of the *Punch* story was a brilliant young subaltern, who in the course of his first year in the army, had been placed under arrest upon only two occasions; the first for wearing a soft cap when as an officer and gentleman he should have worn a stiff one; and again six months later for wearing a stiff cap when as an officer and gentleman he should have worn a soft one.

The 29th Battalion relieved us on the night of August 8 and we moved into Brigade reserve. Headquarters with two companies went back to Micmac Camp, one company went to Scottish Wood and the other remained in Voormezele. At 11 p.m. Captain Leslie, M.O. of the 29th Battalion, took over the post from me and I went to Micmac Camp. During our tour of eight days, 72 sick and 32 wounded passed through the aid post. Thirteen sick were admitted to hospital, five of whom belonged to the 31st Battalion. Twenty-two of the wounded belonged to our unit and 12 of the total were stretcher cases. One officer, Lieutenant Sara,⁹ and one man died in the Casualty Clearing Station. Four of our

9 Lieut. John Thomas Leonard Sara, died of wounds, August 5, 1916, age 24. *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, Wigney, 665. While out on a fighting patrol Scout Officer Sara was shot through the head during a sudden encounter with the enemy. Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 122.

unit were killed in the trenches. These figures indicate clearly the constant wastage of personnel in war, even in periods of comparative quiet which were called "Times of Peace."

The battalion was now somewhat scattered. I remained with the headquarters at Micmac Camp, but made frequent visits to C Company in Scottish Wood. On August 16 the battalion moved from Brigade to Divisional reserve in Ontario Camp. On the next afternoon I gave a lecture on march hygiene to one of the companies. There was a heavy rain that evening.

Major-General Sir Sam Hughes inspected the 6th Brigade on August 18. The troops of the brigade were very steady on parade and behaved in a faultless manner. Nevertheless there was a noticeable lack of enthusiasm. Sir Sam seemed inclined to be facetious on this occasion, and did not show the best of taste when addressing the men after inspection. He remarked that the men looked just as well as when he had seen them in England the previous summer, evidently forgetting, if he ever thought of the matter at all, that the men to whom he was speaking were to a large extent another group of individuals. Altogether Sir Sam's intentions seemed to be of the best, and his effort towards affability genuine. However his audience was out of sympathy with him, and the effect was painful. When Brigadier-General Ketchen called for cheers for the inspecting officer the brigade responded promptly and cheerfully as they would have done to any command. But both before and afterwards, until they marched away, the men maintained the same attitude of resigned impassiveness. To me at least, the effect was almost disconcerting. Perhaps my imagination was playing me tricks, and I read more into the demeanour of the men than was warranted. Nevertheless I shall always remember the occasion as the most trying inspection in which I ever took part. Physically it was one of the easiest, for the whole performance was over within a short time.

During the summer – I forget the date – Lieut.-Col. Bell and I rode over to No. 3 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station when we were out of the line.¹⁰ The unit was under the command of Colonel R. J. Blanchard in whose surgical service I had served as house surgeon in the Winnipeg General Hospital many years before. We saw Colonel Blanchard and

10 No. 3 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, mobilized in Winnipeg, June 1915, was in France at Remy Siding at the time.

several other medical officers and nurses whom I knew, among them Captain W. Lyall and Nursing Sister Inga Johnson.

The summer was advancing; the weather was fine and warm, and the French and Flemish peasants were busy with their harvests. Much of the reaping was done by hand; and it was pathetic to see the women and old grandfathers labouring in the fields. One seldom saw a man of military age at work; those remaining were the leavings of the sword.

XV THE JOURNEY TO THE SOMME

Whether from Naishapur or Babylon,
Whether the cup with sweet or bitter run,
The wine of life keeps oozing drop by drop,
The leaves of life keep falling one by one.

– Edward Fitzgerald, *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*

The 2nd Division, of which the 31st Battalion was a component part, had come to the end of its first phase of activity in the theatre of war. The rumours we had heard regarding the intention of the higher command to move the Canadian Corps to the Somme were now known to be founded upon fact; and our division was being taken out of line for rest, refitting and training. The soldiers called a respite of this kind “the fattening process.”¹ Our battalion had been engaged in front line duty almost continuously since our arrival from England. Through the severe casualties of the general engagements of April and June, and by reason of the constant wastage of which I have spoken, the personnel of the unit had undergone a considerable change, the casualties having been replaced by reinforcement drafts. However, the majority of the original officers were still on duty.

On August 19 the 6th Brigade received orders to begin the move to a new area the following day. The orderlies and I did a bit of house cleaning, and discarded everything down to regulation weight. Up to that time we had retained the box that we had brought with us from Calgary for the purpose of carrying stores and equipment surplus to establishment. This was now “ditched,” to use a term employed by Willis. And in sorting out our supplies that were carried in the Maltese cart I found that Willis had been acting as the custodian for a weird collection of war souvenirs given to him for safe keeping by his friends in the battalion because we had a cart. We turned out all sorts of articles, brass cartridge cases, nose caps of shells, German saw bayonets and the Lord

1 Preparation for a general engagement.

knows what. One particularly precious relic was a fancy tile that one of the men had recovered from a wrecked bathroom in Ypres, and which he had sold to another as coming from the altar of Ypres Cathedral. The proud possessor had been carrying his treasure back and forth in his pack until Willis relieved him of his burden. The most valuable article abandoned was the box, which had been made by our battalion pioneers in Calgary. I dare say it is still serving a useful purpose in some Belgian farmhouse.

I held an evening sick parade and cleared all of our temporarily unfit to the field ambulance. I knew that we had heavy marching in prospect, and did not wish the unit encumbered by sick or half sick men. At 7:00 on the following morning I held another sick parade, but there were no further admissions to hospital as I had cleaned up pretty well the night before. At 9 a.m. we marched out of Reninghelst with the 6th Brigade, and at 5 p.m. went into billets to the south of Steenvoorde in France. We had had a stiff march on a hot day and many of the men had blistered feet. The whole battalion was paraded for a foot bath of 2% formaldehyde solution.

The 4th Canadian Division was now moving into the war zone, and some of its units were billeted in this vicinity, which had been occupied by us when we first arrived in France nearly a year before. In the course of the evening I had two visitors, my old friend, Major Moshier of the 11th Field Ambulance, and Captain Cooper Johnston, the medical officer of the 50th Battalion. Captain Ross Palmer, our paymaster, had a tiny tent about three feet high but large enough to contain two sleeping kits. He was kind enough to invite me to share his tent, which was pitched in a field of clean grass. We both slept in comfort in spite of the rain which poured most of the night.

I was up at 4:30 the next morning and held sick parade at the different company billets. Four men were marked for hospital and directed to fall out at the first crossroads we reached on the march, there to be picked up by a motor ambulance. At 7:45 the unit left for the 6th Brigade assembly point. Thus began the longest and most trying march I experienced with the battalion in France. We did not reach our destination until 6 p.m., after more than ten hours on the road. We travelled through many towns and villages, among them Cassel, Oxalaire, Bavinchove, Noordpeene and Broxeele. I travelled at the rear of the column with Major Hewgill and Ross Palmer. The Major and I were held responsible for the prevention of falling out and the maintenance of march discipline.

There is no more exacting duty in military service. To perform it effectively one might well pray, as did Lady Macbeth, to be filled from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty. The day was hot and cloudless after the rain; the men were carrying heavy packs; the hills were steep and the way long. During the long hot afternoon many of the men showed signs of distress and would have exchanged their lives for the privilege of falling out and lying down to rest in the shade of the roadside trees. At the ten-minute halts some of the men would take off their boots to ease their tortured feet. It was not a pretty sight to see men sitting on the roadside in a state of more or less physical collapse with their faces showing purple and pale blotches intermingled, and with the blood oozing from between their toes and staining their socks. But it was not permissible for the officers in the rear of the column to betray any feeling of compassion or sympathy. Instead we had to curse them, cajole and coax, threaten and promise, appeal to their pride and power of endurance; in short to do anything but show a sign of pity; and to adopt any means of keeping them moving forward until they dropped through sheer exhaustion.

As mentioned earlier, we reached our destination at 6 p.m. This was the pleasant village of Bolleezele, inhabited by kind and friendly people. I inspected the billets, which were good. The orderlies and stretcher bearers prepared another formaldehyde solution foot bath for the men, many of whom had fallen out during the final few miles and had come limping into quarters in the cool of the evening. We did not have breakfast until 9:00 the following morning, and the men were allowed to rest in billets. I held sick parade two hours later but had no hospital admissions. The men with blistered feet did not parade sick, but were attended in the billets by their stretcher bearers. During the afternoon I inspected these billets and a large number of sore feet. The next morning, August 23, we resumed our regular regimental hours and I also began daily lectures and training for the stretcher bearers and sanitary police. The companies engaged in active training including rifle practice.

Our location was well up into the northwest corner of France, almost within sight of Dunkerque. The weather for the greater part remained fine and warm, and the countryside was attractive and restful. Harvesting and haying were in full progress, the work being done, as in other parts, by the old men and the women. Many quite young girls were busy in the fields. Our troops were employed on short hours, and in their spare time they turned in and rendered valuable help. Naturally

help was more abundant where the pretty girls happened to be working. During our week in Bollezeele the men had a good rest; and they needed it to prepare them for what was to come.

I shall always have agreeable memories of the place. I became acquainted with the village doctor, who was a man of culture and with a good knowledge of the English language. He was a graduate of the University of Lille, then in possession of the enemy. On August 26 I sent a man who showed signs of dementia to the 6th Field Ambulance. Why more of the men did not lose their reason I cannot imagine; perhaps it was because they had little opportunity to indulge in introspection.

We moved out of Bollezeele on August 28. Sick parade was at 5 a.m., the fall in at 6:30 and the march out at 7:00. At 9:14 we reached the Brigade starting point and proceeded on our way. I have taken these precise time records from my diary to show the absolute necessity of observing strict punctuality in the army. When units were assembling for movement in a larger formation 9:14 did not mean 9:13 or 9:15, but exactly what the order read. Any deviation from the exact terms of the operation order caused moving bodies of troops to get in each other's way, with resulting confusion and delay. Hence any failure of a unit to be precisely on time brought swift and stern admonition from the higher command. I do not know of any useful by-product of warfare; but if there be such a thing it must be in combating our besetting sin of failing to keep appointments on time.

We marched in a southwesterly direction, passed through the village of Watten, and soon afterwards crossed the main line of railway communication for the 2nd Army. This railway ran eastward from Calais and a little south through St. Omer, Hazebrouck and Bailleul to Armentières, alleged home of the damsel so famous in song. Showers of rain sprinkled us on the way. At 10:40 we reached our billeting area in the vicinity of Ganspette, a short distance south of the forest of Eperlecques. Battalion Headquarters had a good billet in the Château of Eperlecques, but most of the other billets were poor and scattered. A blacksmith shop was the best thing I could find for a medical inspection room. There had been no falling out during the march which was comparatively short.

Several miles south of the forest of Eperlecques the British military authorities had taken a lease of a large training area in rough hilly country west and north of St. Omer. Compensation had been paid for the crops, which were of no great value in any case. I remember that there were some old abandoned quarries on the property. This area was to be the scene of our activities for the week following our arrival.

The morning of August 29 was dull and gloomy. I held sick parade at 6 a.m. and at 8:00 the whole battalion began the march out to the training area. The day began badly. During rifle exercises one of the men inadvertently used a live charge in his rifle and shot another through the ankle, fracturing the lower end of the tibia. I recall that we used walking sticks to provide splints. A British field ambulance sent one of their motor cars for him. In the afternoon I attempted to lecture to a first aid group, but had to desist on account of the heavy rain that set in. The whole parade was called off and the battalion marched back to billets. An exceedingly wet night followed. Sir Andrew Macphail wrote a lively description of the experiences of the 6th Field Ambulance in their process of making camp on that occasion.

At 5:00 the next morning there was still a steady downpour. I held sick parade at 6 a.m., but the battalion was not sent out to the training area. In the afternoon Major Hewgill, the adjutant and I rode around together visiting the various billets. After we returned to our quarters I was called to see a man suffering from acute alcoholic poisoning. Worse than that, he had robbed a stretcher bearer's dressing haversack and consumed the stock of morphine therein. We had to perform artificial respiration for 40 minutes, for his breathing stopped, and it was that long before we could get it going again. After we got his natural respiration resumed we poured quantities of hot black coffee into him and kept him walking about until we considered him out of danger, for the time being at least. He had evidently embarked upon a real spree, for we found afterwards that he had consumed part of a bottle of liquid ammonia that he had found in his billet, and which had been kept for cleansing purposes. It may have been a case of attempted suicide. I admitted him to hospital the next day, and never learned whether he recovered or not.²

August 31 was fine and bright, and the battalion went out to the training grounds. I did a little minor surgical work and then made an inspection round of the billets before I joined the unit in the training area at 10 a.m. At noon I paid a visit to the Assistant Director of Medical Services in Tilques. The weather remained fine for several days and training went

2 McGill's War Diary identified the soldier as Private C. H. Smith. War Diary of M.O., 31st Battalion, 30 August 1916. Charles Henry Smith died on August 31, the day he was admitted to hospital. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 695, recorded that he died of disease.

on. On Sept. 3 the battalion marched out for a night training operation at 4 p.m. and returned at midnight.

September 4 was our last day in the area. The battalion had orders to march to St. Omer after dark and entrain for the Somme. During the evening, while we were waiting for the hour of departure, the proprietor of the château entertained the headquarters officers. He dispensed some very fine wines, and as a special treat produced a bottle of Dewar's whisky which he served in small liqueur glasses. Rain set in at 6 p.m., but by the time the march began at 11 p.m. it had ceased. We had only some ten miles to go and an easy pace was set. At one of the roadside halts a member of a recently arrived draft broke forth in song. He was in one of the forward companies. In the rear, one of the veterans, who evidently possessed a clear appreciation of what we were headed for remarked to his companion: "Well, it's a nice thing to see somebody happy."

"No," replied the other, "that fellow isn't happy; he's only ignorant."

We reached St. Omer at 3:30 on the morning of September 5, and entraining was under way within a few minutes. It was a pleasure to see how rapidly and well the transport section loaded their gear, horses and limbers. An officer who had just returned from leave in England cheered us up by his story of having seen two Zeppelins shot down in flames over London.

At 5:30 in the morning our train pulled out for the Somme. This train was one of seemingly interminable length, and travelled by a round-about way at a slow speed towards our fateful destination. I remember that we passed Boulogne and Étaples. At one place we had a clear view of the open sea from our car windows. The sight gave me a poignant feeling of home sickness; and I am sure this was shared by others, many of whom were looking for the last time in their lives upon the great highway of the British race. We had a long delay at Étaples, and slow as the train was in starting it was fast enough to leave our padre, Captain Walker, behind. The Padre was in at the lunch counter when the train moved off. He ran out of the station and attempted to catch the train by a sprint. Although he ran fast and was cheered loudly by hundreds poking their heads out of the windows he failed to reach his objective.

The train meandered on, and in the course of the afternoon passed through a considerable forest. Although we were still in early September the leaves were fluttering down from the trees; and this inspired Captain Palmer to break into poetry. He recited Omar Khayyam, including the

verse that I have placed at the head of this chapter. The verse quoted struck me at the time as being dolefully prophetic of the experiences we were about to encounter.

At 3 p.m. we reached our detraining point, the town of Candas, and in 45 minutes the battalion was ready to move off, complete with transport. We marched in a southeasterly direction towards the front, the band playing "The Long, Long Trail" among other airs. At 6:30 we reached a tent camp near a little crossroads hamlet called Val de Maison where we billeted for the night.

We were not favourably impressed by the country through which we marched. It was picturesque in the way of natural features in the form of rolling hills and pretty patches of wood, but did not exhibit the signs of the rich fertility seen in the Ypres district from which we had come. The farm buildings, instead of being in detached units, were huddled with the barns into little villages, the inhabitants of which cultivated the adjoining fields. These little villages had a forlorn and decayed appearance, and the fields looked hungry and starved. The subsoil of this part of France is all chalk, and the overlying earth is of no great depth. In consequence I should imagine that the fields return a stingy reward for the work of the husbandman.

We had a fairly comfortable night in our camp, and the morning of September 6 was bright and warm. While we were waiting for the fall in, a body of Australian troops passed along the road on their way out of the battle zone. These were some of the troops we were relieving. We left camp at 9 a.m., and at 1 p.m. reached a bivouac area where we spent the afternoon and the following night. We had no shelter, but the weather was fine and warm and the site was on a nice dry hillside with a grove of fine trees close by. During the afternoon we entertained ourselves by playing ourselves a recently acquired record, "Casey," on our portable gramophone. We were now fairly near the very active front, and the artillery maintained a steady roar throughout the night.

The morning of September 7 was cool, as befitted September, but was bright and pleasant. We moved out of the bivouac at 9:10 and proceeded eastward toward Albert. About noon we caught sight of this famous city for which we had kept an eager lookout during the final few miles of our march. Then I saw for the first time the shelled church with the huge figure of the Virgin leaning at a right angle to its pedestal on the church tower, and hanging high over the street below. We had all heard, of course, the description of the leaning Virgin, and had seen many

pictures of this curious result of enemy shell fire. There was a saying among the French peasants that the war would continue until the figure fell into the street. Eighteen months after the time of which I write, it was finally tumbled into the street during the last frantic attack of the Germans in their attempt to win the war in March, 1918.

XVI THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

'Tis certain he hath past the river Somme.
And if he be not fought withal, my lord,
Let us not live in France; let us quit all,
And give our vineyards to a barbarous people.

– Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Act III, Scene V

At 1:30 p.m. on September 7, we reached our bivouac area in a space called the Albert Brickfields, a short distance to the northwest of the town. No one had fallen out during the march. Our bivouac was on the high ground west of the river Ancre which flows through Albert. From this vantage point we could see much of the back country covered with camps, bivouacs, horse lines, ammunition and supply dumps, and all the signs of war.

We had at last come to the famous battlefield of the Somme. An almost continuous battle had raged on this front since the first day of July, and there was abundant evidence of military operations on a large and intensive scale. Aeroplanes droned overhead going to and from the front. These were chiefly of the larger pusher type of our plane known as F.E., and which for the moment gave us almost complete air mastery, but which was obsolete six months later. It was well that our air dominance kept enemy observation at a minimum for the country was much more open than where we had been in Belgium, and there was little opportunity for troops to effect concealment. When darkness shut out the scene, the steady thunder of artillery kept us in mind of the business in which we were engaged.

Fortunately the weather kept fine for a time, although the nights were becoming cool and the men were suffering through lack of blankets. We all slept on the ground in the open. As I remember conditions, we had but two tents, one for the orderly room and one for the commanding officer. I am also under the impression that we had a shelter made up of tarpaulins where we sat in the evenings. We knew that we were under orders to participate in a general action of major proportions within a

few days, and during our evening discussions we indulged in speculation as to what lay before us. I remember remarking one evening that I did not think what was coming would be any worse than some of the work we had already gone through. Pinkham was among those present, and I shall always remember his reply.

"That may all be true," he said, "but you must remember that some of the shows we have been through have been rough enough."

On September 10 our battalion relieved portions of the 3rd and 4th Battalions in La Boisselle and Pozières. The names of these villages were household words less than 20 years ago, but probably mean nothing to the present generation. It must be remembered that as villages they had ceased to exist, and remained only as map locations and names. For the terrible artillery fire of the Somme not only destroyed the villages but eradicated them completely, so that not one brick was left upon another. Finally the individual bricks were ground into dust by the eroding effects of the never-ceasing rain of shells. Nothing above the ground endured: for the most part the troops lived in dugouts and moved in trenches.

The towns I mention had been wrested from the enemy during the early weeks of the battle, and as the Germans were driven back they turned their guns upon the territory we now occupied. Nevertheless the Somme area had one advantage over the Ypres Salient; the dugouts had been built by the Germans, were well timbered, and went deeply into the chalk, giving good protection against even a direct hit by a heavy shell.

At 3 p.m., September 10, the battalion left the bivouac, marched through Albert and followed the Albert-Bapaume road towards the front. Two companies remained in La Boisselle while Headquarters and the other two companies went into brigade support near Pozières, where there were a number of deep dugouts. The remains of Contalmaison and Mametz Wood lay to our right.

As we marched up the road from Albert we soon crossed the old July 1, 1916 front line. The hillsides were seamed everywhere with old trenches, showing the white chalk which underlay the soil. At La Boisselle we passed the huge crater of which we had read in the war news. We were left in no doubt as to the nature of the fierce contest that had been in progress for weeks, now going into months. The ground was thickly pock-marked with shell holes which also exposed the white chalk; and shrapnel shell cases littered the surface in every direction. As we approached our destination, the signs of war became even more manifest. We were now well within the former German lines and German arms, ammunition and discarded equipment were in evidence everywhere. In many places the

trenches were paved with flat wicker baskets still containing the loaded cartridges for the German howitzers.

Dugouts were limited in number and we could not obtain one for an aid post. The orderlies found a small dugout in which to sleep, but we held our sick parades in the trench where our medical equipment was stored. The Advanced Dressing Station of the 3rd Canadian Field Ambulance was in a deep dugout not far away.

The area in which we were located, and to our rear in the direction of the high ground where La Boisselle was situated, was known locally as Sausage Valley. The road ran along the bottom of this shallow valley which was one or two hundred yards in width and contained by hills so low they seemed scarcely more than banks. The site of the obliterated village of Pozières was on higher ground towards our front.

When I went to the Somme I entertained the idea that I was somewhat of a veteran, and thoroughly inured and accustomed to the signs of war. But the combination of sounds, sights and smells in this area was something far beyond anything in my previous experience, and revolted and sickened me beyond my power of expression.

Every inch of this ground had been stubbornly contested. The attack had been relentlessly pushed forward, and little time had been spent in cleaning up the wreckage, or putting the captured territory into a state to prevent its being an offence and outrage to those who followed after. One could travel but a short way without coming across the remains of unburied dead, or bodies that had been disinterred by shell fire. The area in which we took station was extremely dirty and unsanitary. Flies were in clouds, both house flies and the loathsome blue bottle variety. Often as one moved along he might notice a patch on the ground of perhaps a foot in diameter and displaying a metallic lustre. As he approached this patch it would dissolve into a cloud of loudly buzzing blue-bottle flies, and underneath could be seen the tattered fragments of what had been a living human being a few days before. The air in the dugout was literally thick with house flies. We obtained an issue of large hand-spraying syringes and a quantity of "fly-tox," which helped a little. During this, our first day in the area, we put parties of men to work, trying to clean up and make our surroundings less offensive. Needless to say, we did not eat our first meals in these quarters with very sharp appetites.

The evening we took over, September 10, a unit of the 1st Division was being relieved, and was coming out just after dusk. The medical officer of the battalion halted with a group near our dugouts. In spite of his steel hat and three or four day's growth of beard I recognized a former

fellow practitioner from Calgary. He had been a keen believer in the oil possibilities of Turner Valley near Calgary. Walking over and touching his shoulder I asked: "Well Tommy; what do you think of the prospects of oil shares in the Turner Valley field now?"

The medical officer stared at me for several minutes before he displayed any sign of recognition. He finally did so, and gave me his assurance that his faith in the oil business was still unshaken. He was Dr. Tommy O'Hagan in civil life. Soon his unit moved on and he went with them. I did not see him again until we met at a dressing station in the battle of Amiens two years later. These "Ships that pass in the night" incidents were a commonplace of war experiences.

On September 11, the 4th Field Ambulance took over the Advanced Dressing Station from the 3rd Field Ambulance of the 1st Canadian Division. That evening when our transport came up with rations, I sent all of our medical kit back to the horse lines, retaining only our dressings, morphine, iodine and a few instruments. We were clearing for action.

At 9:30 a.m. the next day our men had a little encouragement from seeing an enemy plane shot down in flames behind our lines. It struck the ground a few hundred yards away from us. Artillery fire raged all afternoon and we had a couple of men wounded. A drizzling rain fell in the evening. We had two men killed and several wounded on a working party during the night.

We had now been in this support position for two days, and were becoming more or less accustomed to the situation. The idea did not occur to me at the time, but later on, and still during the war, I marvelled at the callous brutality, or perhaps the indifference that we soon developed towards attending circumstances. In my experience this aspect of affairs was more noticeable in the battle of the Somme than at any other time during the war, before or afterwards. Why! I saw on the road leading down into Sausage Valley, a man's arm lying in the middle of the roadway and driven over and over by the wheels of limbers. Apparently nobody ever thought of even taking the trouble to throw it into a shell hole beside the road. And strange to say, while I shudder to think of the incident now, at the time it did not strike me as being anything so much out of the ordinary. I suppose this attitude of mind is a protective device of nature to prevent collapse of the nervous system. On the other hand, I am certain that the survivors suffered the delayed effects afterwards. And yet it is evident that some of those, even with judicial training, who are charged with the duty of deciding pension claims, hold the opinion

that a man could go through months and years of this sort of thing without evil effects so long as he was not in receipt of a physical injury.

September 14 was fine but cool and the men were all in good spirits and ready for the attack that was ordered for daybreak the following morning. During the day Petty, the signaling officer, said to me, "These tanks should be a great help to us tomorrow."

"Tanks?" I said, "What tanks?" For until that moment I had never heard of these new and revolutionary engines of warfare. Petty tried to explain the new devices to me, but I must confess I had a very hazy idea of what they looked like until I saw them in action the next morning.

The time had come for me to pick out a position for the Regimental Aid Post during the coming battle. In the forenoon I went up the communication trench called Centre Way, looking for suitable and available dugouts. I found two quite close together situated a little behind the front line. One would be used as Battalion Headquarters, and I decided the other would serve my purpose, if I could get it. It was small, and would not admit a stretcher, but it was the best I could find. The entrance from the trench turned at right angles, and at the turn a ladder led up to a small opening in the roof. This feature proved useful later as will be seen.

At 4 p.m. the battalion was "Standing to," waiting for the conclusion of our evening bombardment which was scheduled to begin at 7:00. The move into the assembly trenches would begin after the enemy retaliation had died down. In the meantime I saw all the company stretcher bearers, and gave them final instructions including the probable location of the aid post.

Among the men waiting I noticed a young chap, 17 years of age, who had fought and carried his pack with the best of them. I do wish that I could remember the boy's name but I have no record of it. We had been arranging to transfer him to the mechanical transport because of his being under age. I called out to him, "Has your transfer not come through yet?"

"It's on its way," he replied, "this will be my last trip in the trenches."

As events proved it *was* to be his last visit to the trenches, for the poor kid, always with a smile on his face, did not come out of the fight the following day. I do not even know that his body was ever found. Likely as not it was stirred up in the shell-tortured earth north of Pozières – like a raisin in a pudding.

The Canadian Corps was to form part of the force assigned to a large-scale general attack upon the German line at 6:20 on the morning of September 15. Our 6th Brigade was on the extreme left or “Refused Flank,” and was attacking with three battalions, the 27th, the 28th, and the 31st. We were to be aided by the tanks. At 6 p.m., September 14, I sent Corporal Bright ahead to secure and hold the dugout I had selected for our aid post, and to await my arrival. As I have mentioned, an intense bombardment from our artillery was billed to take place in the evening, to begin at 7 p.m., and it was to last 50 minutes. At 6:30 I left Battalion Headquarters in company with Willis and my batman, Ben Jones. We were in a trench called Copse Avenue, when, promptly at 7 p.m. our bombardment began. The enemy’s counter barrage came back within a few minutes and looked too thick for us to face for the time being. We took refuge in the aid post dugout of the 29th Battalion, and waited for the storm to subside. At 8 p.m. we started out again for our dugout on Centre Way which we reached an hour later. The German artillery was still very busy. Upon arrival at the dugout we found it occupied by a platoon of the 5th C.M.R.¹ Battalion, a unit of the 3rd Canadian Division. We were told that they were moving out at 11:30 p.m. and that we might call the place our own after that hour. During the interval I paid a visit to Battalion Headquarters where the 28th Battalion and 31st Battalion had combined their headquarters in the same dugout 50 yards up the trench. Captain Cullum, medical officer of the former, had joined us with his orderlies and we also decided to combine forces. Owing to the great concentration of troops there was much crowding in the assembly trenches.

By 1 a.m. on September 15, a clear moonlit night, the artillery fire was dying down and the Canadian Mounted Rifles had taken their departure. Our first casualty was Sergeant Turner of C Company. He had a severe abdominal wound. The carrying party had brought him out overland; how they managed to find our post I do not know. I climbed out of the dugout by the ladder and attended the wounded sergeant in the open. I then attached a red ticket to the casualty which meant “Urgency” and sent the party on out with him. He recovered, I am pleased to report, and I believe he is now a bank manager in Northern Alberta. At 3 a.m. I again visited Battalion Headquarters. The unit was all in position, and

1 “C.M.R.” referred to the Canadian Mounted Rifle Battalions. The 8th Brigade consisted of four of these – the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th. Raised initially as mounted troops, they had been converted to regular infantry in 1915. – P B.

some of the company commanders were sitting in the dugout. I remember that Splane² and Pinkham³ were there. Both were killed in the attack a few hours later.

When I returned to our dugout I turned in for a couple of hours sleep before the show began. At 6:20 I was awakened by the onset of our barrage, and climbed up the ladder to the opening in the roof from where I had a clear view of the attack going forward. Our artillery and machine guns were putting on an intense barrage, and the streams of machine gun bullets seemed to be passing just over our heads. I dare say they were higher than they seemed to be for the machine guns as well as the artillery were firing on the German lines, over the heads of the attacking troops. Two tanks were in sight, one moving forward, the other halted and apparently in trouble. The men were going forward in perfect alignment and keeping a steady and even pace. As for the tanks, this was my first sight of those grotesque monsters that were of such invaluable aid to us in future actions.

I have never seen a moving picture of an infantry attack that gave an accurate impression of the scene. In all of them the troops are represented as rushing forward at the double. Perhaps the effect is produced by speeding up the film reel. Actually the infantry line followed the barrage at a pace of from three to four minutes per hundred yards. Even the more rapid advance is slow compared with that depicted in films.

Within a few minutes the German counter-barrage came back in full strength, and the action was fairly joined. We did not have long to watch the show, for soon wounded, chiefly walking at first, began to arrive, and we became engrossed in our own special part of the drama. One

2 Major Howard Mylne Splane, killed in action, September 15, 1916. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 709. Major Splane was killed near the outset while leading three platoons of A Company in a support action, after the first wave of the 31st Battalion attack. Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 148.

3 McGill to Emma Griffis, 26 November 1916. Harold and Emma McGill, f. 742, Glenbow Archives. In this letter to Emma, Harold expressed his personal grief over the death of Capt. Ernest Frederick Pinkham, age 25, the officer commanding C Company. "Did you know Captain Pinkham in civil life? He was one of the 'Noblest Romans of them all.' He was killed on September 15 in one of our big fights. I saw him last at about 3:30 in the morning just before he left headquarters dugout to join his men whom he led over the parapet at 6:20 a.m. We lost a number of fine officers in September but I think I miss Pinkham more than any other. He was a quiet chap but a splendid officer and without fear." Ernest Pinkham, the youngest son of Anglican Bishop Cyprian Pinkham, was a twenty-three-year-old law student when he enlisted. A memorial plaque to Ernest Pinkham is located in the Anglican Cathedral, the Church of the Redeemer, in Calgary.

of the first casualties we had to attend was poor Ben Jones, my faithful batman. He had been outside the dugout watching the attack when a piece of shell casing tore away a side of his skull. The other boys brought him into the dugout, but he was beyond all possibility of recovery, and died within a short time.⁴ We placed his body over the side of the trench, and had no time to give any further thought to his memory until late the following day for by this time the stream of wounded had now set in and all of us were busy enough. An hour after the action had begun, a batch of 20 German wounded, including one officer, were brought in. This circumstance lent us encouragement, for it indicated that our men had reached their objective and were driving the attack home. The German officer was a particularly nasty sort of person and objected vigorously to his papers and *kriegbuch*⁵ being taken away from him. He displayed poor judgment in this, for our men by this time were in a state known as being "Battle drunk," and were in the humour to adopt summary measures on very little provocation.

This officer had only a slight wound, and after it was dressed he engaged in an altercation with Bright on the question of giving up his *kriegbuch*. In the meantime he was blocking the door of the dugout and preventing the entrance of other wounded. Finally Bright reached for his rifle, and at this I thought it time to intervene. With scant courtesy the officer was handed over to the escort and hustled down the trench with the rest of his compatriots.

By 8 a.m. the dugout and the trench up and down were filled with badly wounded. We did not try to get the stretchers into the dugout, but dressed the lying cases in the trench or in the open. I sent out messages to the Field Ambulance and to the Brigade for carrying parties. At noon one arrived from the 29th Battalion and cleared out all our stretcher cases. More casualties soon took their places. At 2 p.m. Captain Graham Ross of the 6th Field Ambulance came in with a squad who took out two severely wounded, but more remained. Ross promised to send back more help.

At 6 p.m. the enemy shelling was very thick. I took a minute off duty and ran down to the Battalion Headquarters for information and to ask for carrying parties. Here I learned that the Canadian Corps had

4 Pte. Benjamin Jones, who was born in Carmarthenshire, Wales, was a barber. When he enlisted at Medicine Hat he was twenty-three years of age and a scout in the 78th Highlanders.

5 *Kriegbuch*: personal war diary.

reached all first objectives, and that the 5th and 7th Brigades were pushing the attack into Courcellette and Mouquet Farm, respectively. British divisions on our right had been equally successful, having captured the villages of Martinpuich and Flers, with thousands of prisoners.

In the organization of our attack the 31st Battalion provided a sacrifice patrol whose duty it was to push on well ahead of the main body and exploit any success to the utmost. Scott and Yule were the officers in command of this forlorn hope. They reached Courcellette early in the forenoon, and the attack to storm and capture the village was ordered as the result of reports they had sent back. Sergeant Muncaster of Calgary, whose father was a padre with the 1st Division, was with this party.

At this evening hour there was a short respite for us in the Regimental Aid Post, and for a time there were few wounded. Soon the flow began again, but now nearly all the casualties were from the 42nd Battalion, a unit of the 7th Brigade which was attacking Mouquet Farm. We saw few if any casualties from the 5th Brigade of our own division as they were too far to our right.

The trench began to fill up with lying wounded again, and, as the shelling was heavy, Captain Cullum and I urged all that could walk to do so and get out of the danger area. A German with a smashed shoulder lay on a stretcher in front of the door. A party of walking wounded was starting out, and Cullum and I were trying to persuade the stricken enemy to join it. He was of a different opinion however and disclaimed ability to walk. While Cullum was standing at one end of the stretcher and I at the other, a field artillery shell struck the edge of the trench and exploded between us. Why all three of us were not knocked out I do not know. Cullum and I were both thrown to the bottom of the trench. He had a slight scalp wound, and I had a leg bruised through my legging. Otherwise we were uninjured. I do not think the German was touched at all, but the incident brought about a sudden revision of his ideas as to his ability to walk. He suddenly decided that he could do so, and lost no time in putting his resolution into effect.

A little later on our trench entrance to the dugout was blown in and completely blocked by a heavy shell. The dugout was filled by the thick acrid fumes of the explosive. For a time, all ingress and egress was by the ladder and the hole through the roof. We were now badly congested with wounded. The ambulance squads had not returned and I sent out urgent messages for carrying parties. In the meantime we kept all the walking cases packed into our dugout for safety during the heavy shelling. One of them was a man from the 42nd Battalion who must have

been nearly 50 years of age and had been shot through the calf of the leg. He was anxious to walk out and save the boys the labour of carrying him. In order to prevent his leg becoming stiff he took turns at walking up and down the dugout, keeping up a running fire of comment on the happenings of the day. He seemed to be a prime favourite with the other wounded of his unit who all addressed him affectionately as "Dad." Some of his naive remarks were scarcely amusing, but I have long since forgotten what they were. I remember though that he deplored the necessity of killing the enemy, who seemed to him to have their good points; but supposed that it had to be done.

Meanwhile we had dug out and cleared the entrance that had been blown in. At 1 a.m. on the morning of September 16 the long looked for carrying party arrived from the field ambulance. They had lost their way in the darkness; hence the delay. By 8 a.m. we had all our wounded cleared, and at 9:00 we received word that the 28th and 31st Battalions had been relieved. We all prepared to follow out.

Before leaving we buried the body of poor Ben Jones which had been lying outside the trench since the beginning of the battle on the previous day. We dug the grave in the bottom of a shell hole and conducted the burial with quiet dignity although without loss of time, for the enemy was planting shells within 100 yards of us. After we laid the body decently at rest and filled the grave we all stood to attention, saluted and turned away. More than two years later Jones' brother, a London policeman, wrote to me when I was with the army of occupation in Germany, asking for the position of his brother's grave. I replied, giving him as detailed directions as I could, but Heaven knows what state the grave may have been in even an hour after we left the scene. The policeman wrote me again to thank me and said that he had translated my letter into Welsh and sent it to his old father in Wales.

At 10 a.m. Cullum and I turned over the Regimental Aid Post to the M.O. of the Royal Canadian Regiment and went out overland to the 6th Brigade Headquarters. The remnants of the 31st Battalion were collecting at Casualty Corner at the south end of Sausage Valley. Here Bright, Willis and I rejoined our unit and I reported to Lieut.-Col. Bell. It was then we learned for the first time the extent of our success and that the 5th Brigade had taken the village of Courcellette the evening before. We also heard the details, or at least some of them, of our heavy casualties. The total estimate was nearly 300 in our battalion. Seven officers were dead, including three company commanders. Two of the companies had come out of action in command of company sergeant-majors. Splane,

LETTER DATED 12 DECEMBER 1918, SENT TO HAROLD MCGILL FROM BEN JONES' BROTHER - THOMAS LLEWELLYN JONES - READ:

R. N. College
Metropolitan Police
Greenwich St 10
London E.C. 6
Tuesday.
24-12-18
To Major McGill.
5 1/2 Cam. Field ambulance
Bonn Prussia

Dear Sir
I most respectfully beg to
acknowledge your kind letter
in reply to mine of the 21st Nov.
re the location of my late dear
brother's grave, and herewith ex-
pressing you my heartfelt thanks
and sincere gratitude for what
you have done to me, and I
shall send your much appreciated
letter to Walter, so that my dear aged
father may be somehow enlightened
on the matter.

It is some consolation to know that
you administered all in your power
for him, and receive every possible
care & that you in his last moments
did everything possible

In my dear home ² in Wales, the dear
old arm chair by the fireside is now
vacant for evermore, and a more
dear devoted brother I could never
better have, he was 3 years my senior
and received a good education prior
to his leaving for Canada in 1909, he
was being prepared in his studies for
the ministry, but always had a
preference for Agriculture and the far
West was the goal of his ambition.
He always spoke well of his officers &
comrades of his battalion, and the
tie of affection always maintained, &
I very much regret to learn of the death
of Capt. McCullum, who I understand was
also present at the time of his death.
Now they are left behind in their
everlasting resting place, deprived of
the fruits of victory, which they so gloriously
undertook to achieve, while now you
march in triumph along the banks
of the Rhine, & it will some comfort

3

to know that they ^{would} the supreme sacrifice for a worthy cause
and gave their all only a day before his death my dear
brother not to me he was departing leave. Now that you
gloriously reaping the fruits of your great victory with many
a dear comrade left behind, I trust that you may
be spared to pass through, & to return to your dear
home land for your well earned rest.

I wish to convey to you, my deep appreciation for that
what you have done for me, for I am well aware that
the facilities of your hand are none too convenient. Now
I shall what is necessary, & shall translate your kind letter
in a Welsh for my dear father's information.

Dear Major. As an officer and
a thorough gentleman; let me
thank you again sincere
thank you, when I think of
that the cordial spirit; as an
officer you under took personally
to answer my enquiry, which
has much alleviated my anxiety.

In the event of your visiting
London while you have at any
future date I would very much
appreciate the opportunity of meeting
you personally.

Accept my best
& sincere thanks for all
you have for me Yours most truly

Thomas Hewell Jones
Major H. McGill
5th Can. Field Ambulance.

Pinkham, Toole, Boucher, Swain, Sharples, and Conrad, the newly appointed scout officer, were all gone.⁶ Five officers were wounded and one missing. The latter, MacPherson of B Company, had been wounded and sent to the rear with a carrying party.⁷ None of the party was ever seen or heard of again.

Later, many letters were written to the commanding officer and other officers of the battalion bearing accusations and severe reflections in connection with the disappearance of MacPherson. The writers of these letters simply could not be made to realize the possibility of a party of men disappearing in broad daylight without leaving a trace. I have had the same difficulty in trying to explain to others the circumstances attending the cases of men reported "missing." Had these people experienced an enemy bombardment at the battle of the Somme in the autumn of 1916, they would have been more receptive.

Among my 16 stretcher bearers there were two killed, five wounded and one missing. Other units of the division had heavy casualties also. I met Captain Cameron of the 6th Field Ambulance, who told me that their commanding officer, Lieut.-Col. Bligh Campbell had been killed.⁸ Our division had valiantly performed its part in the achievement of victory and had captured thousands of prisoners. Nevertheless it was a rather dismal group of survivors that gathered at Casualty Corner to count our losses, for our victory had not been cheaply bought.

At 2 p.m. on September 16, the battalion received orders to move back to our old bivouac area on the Albert Brickfields, and at 5 p.m. we began our march, reaching our destination in two hours. The men were in surprisingly good spirits. At the Brickfields we met a newly arrived reinforcement draft of 100 N.C.O.s and men sent to help make up for our cruel losses.

On September 17 I held sick parade at 10 a.m. It was a fine bright morning. As was usual after a battle, several wounded men reported for the first time, having stuck it out after being hit until the unit was

6 Lieut. Edward Thomas Toole, killed in action, Sept. 15, 1916, age 31; Capt. Edgar Allen Boucher, killed in action, Sept. 15, 1916, age 30; Lieut. Leonard Reuben Swain, killed in action, Sept. 15, 1916, age 25; Lieut. Eric Alfred Sharples, killed in action, Sept. 15, 1916, age 18; Lieut. Ervin Simeon Conrad, killed in action, Sept. 15, 1916, age 33. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 753, 71, 731, 678, 149.

7 Lieut. Joseph Louis MacPherson, killed in action on Sept. 15, 1916. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 456.

8 Lieut.-Col. Roland Playfair Campbell, No. 6 Field Ambulance, C.A.M.C., killed in action, Sept. 16, 1916. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 113.

relieved. Five of these I admitted to the field ambulance, and sent two more for a dose of anti-tetanus serum. At 1:30 p.m. we began our march into the back country and went into billets in the village of Warloy that evening. After we took over our billets rain set in and poured all night making us thankful that we were not out on the open Brickfields. At 8:30 the following morning we marched out in a heavy rain that poured relentlessly all day. When we reached our billets in the afternoon the men were wet through their clothing. The Corps Commander called to see the Colonel during the afternoon. It was General Byng's practice to do so after a unit had suffered heavy losses.

We spent the night of September 18–19 in the drab little village of La Vicogne. The hard-driving rain continued throughout the night and at 6:30 the next morning was still coming down. By the time the unit marched out at 8:30 the heavy steady rain had ceased, but the weather was still showery. Just before noon we went into indifferent billets in the little village of Fleffe where we were at least protected from the rain which fell in intermittent showers during the afternoon. A reinforcement draft of 175 N.C.O.s and men joined us. Among them were a number of our original members who had gone out wounded in earlier engagements, and who were now rejoining for further service. Sergeants McRae and Boulden, two fine soldiers returning with this draft, were manifestly pleased to be "home again." The next day, September 20, I made a medical inspection of the last two drafts and found their physical condition quite satisfactory. The weather continued rainy and chilly, but the clouds cleared away on the night of September 21. The next day began with a clear bright morning and a hard frost. The latter showed us that winter was on its way.

XVII THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME (CONT'D)

They say it was a shocking sight
After the field was won;
For many thousand bodies here
Lay rotting in the sun;
But things like that, you know, must be
After a famous victory.

– Southey, *The Battle of Blenheim*

We knew that we were slated for another general action on the Somme, and on September 22 we started our march back to the battle front. At 5:30 p.m. we again billeted for the night in La Vicogne. The following day we began our march at 7:45 a.m., passed through the town of Talmas, and reached our billets in Contay at noon. I held sick parade at 5:30 the next morning, and the unit marched out at 7:45. It was a bright cool morning with an east wind. Rain had been almost continuous during our period out of the line, but now that we were returning to the area of activity the weather seemed to favour us. We did not return to the Brickfields but marched through Albert to bivouac at a place called Tara Valley, northeast of Albert. As we settled down for the night the enemy began sprinkling shells about our area but none fell close enough to do any damage. We were under orders to take over the front trenches the following evening to be ready to take part in an attack north of Courcellette on September 26.

A number of officers, N.C.O.s and men were held out of the line in such actions to form a reserve of experienced troops to carry on the work of the unit afterwards, in the event of exceptionally heavy casualties.¹ This was done in the case of the action of September 15, and the scheme was being put into effect again for the coming engagement. While we were out of the line I had recruited my stretcher bearer section up to full strength again and had given the new men what training I

1 The men were designated “L.O.B.” – “left out of battle.” The usual number by 1917–18 was just over 100 per battalion. – P B.

could in the short time at my disposal. Always I had a reserve section of 16 men in training. A few of our old experienced officers had joined us during the interval when we were out of the line, and among them was Lieutenant Arbuckle, who overtook us when we were in bivouac in Tara Valley. Arbuckle was as pleased as a schoolboy on a holiday at his luck in getting back before the show began. I remember I talked to him that evening, and he expressed his especial sorrow because of the death of Pinkham who was deeply mourned by everyone in the battalion.

Among my stretcher bearers a particular favourite was Teddy Barnes, the chief of D Company first aid men. Teddy had been with me since mobilization, and had always distinguished himself in every action. He had done splendidly in the battle of September 15, and his company had made him a sergeant. Any old soldier will understand what a high tribute this promotion meant. The duties of a stretcher bearer do not provide for this rank, and in order to give it the company had to go one short in its establishment of duty sergeants. That the company was willing to do this indicates in what high esteem the officers held the little stretcher bearer.

Teddy was a slight wiry chap with reddish hair, a frank open countenance, bright blue eyes and a most engaging smile. He was quick physically and mentally, and never seemed to tire. As an athlete he had been a close runner-up in the *Herald* Christmas road race the winter we were in Calgary.

I had decided that Barnes should be left out of the line for the impending action. During this evening in bivouac he came to me and said that if I didn't mind, he would go into action with his company the following day.

"I know," he said. "that you have a number of green men, and it may make it easier for you to have with you some of us that have had experience."

I remonstrated with Teddy, pointing out to him that if ever a soldier had done "his bit" he was the one, and telling him that I fully appreciated the spirit that prompted him to volunteer for a dangerous duty from which he had been withdrawn. However, he was insistent; and finally in a moment of weakness and selfishness I consented to let him go in, for I felt that he would really be a dependable help to both his company and to myself.

We spent a fairly comfortable night in bivouac, and the morning of September 25 was bright and fine. I held sick parade at 8 a.m., but only a few paraded sick and there were no admissions to field ambulance. I

have often marvelled at the fortitude shown by the men in their refraining from going sick on the eve of a battle. They fully realized the horrors that were close at hand; but many, feeling not in the best of health, would go into action with a temperature rather than have their pals think that they were trying to dodge danger. Under ordinary circumstances they would have gone sick with ample justification. Indeed, men would go sick to avoid a work party when they would never dream of doing so to escape an action where a casualty list of from 25 to 50 per cent might be expected.

At 9 a.m. Lieutenant Norris had his ankle injured by a horse and was admitted to field ambulance. Norris had won the D.S.O. for his fine work on September 15, and would not have been in the coming battle, in any case, as he was one of those selected to remain in reserve. During the forenoon we left the bivouac area and moved up to Sausage Valley in order that the men would not have a long walk into the assembly trenches at night.

The day was fine and warm and the men were enjoying the period of loafing in the sun. The transport had come up with the column bringing the travelling cook kitchens. We were all enjoying our lunch in the open air when we suffered a sudden and violent interruption. The enemy had his observation balloons up and may have spotted the collection of troops in the valley; or he may have put on the show on the off chance of catching a party moving up the road. In any event while we were at lunch and enjoying ourselves at 1:30 p.m. there descended upon us an intense whirlwind bombardment composed of mixed shrapnel and high explosive. In a few minutes we sustained 28 casualties, three killed and 25 wounded. The Germans were clever in the use of their artillery on this occasion, as they usually were. Of course they knew the ground well, having occupied it previously. The high explosive shells were intended to drive the men out of the shallow dugouts in the valley banks and the shrapnel bursts to catch them in the open.

My men and I were soon busily engaged in attending the wounded. Willis did a particularly fine piece of work. One of our men out in the middle of the valley had been hit and a severed femoral artery was spouting like a hose pipe. Willis ran out to him, and, clapping his thumb over the pressure point, controlled the hemorrhage effectively until I could reach him and apply a tourniquet to the wounded thigh. While shells were bursting all around him Willis sat quietly beside his patient, blocking the circulation in the artery for all the world as though he were taking part in a first aid demonstration in a place of perfect safety.

While I was walking across the valley I had a peculiar experience. I heard the scream of an approaching shell, and from my acquired judgment in such matters knew that it was headed straight in my direction. I jumped for a shell hole close by, and while I was still in the air the screech of the shell reached its crescendo and it burst directly over my head. Fortunately for me it was a shrapnel, and the cone of dispersion² struck the ground some distance further on. I do not suppose the whole incident occupied more than a fraction of a second. Yet, while I was in the course of my jump, I seemed to myself to be suspended helplessly in mid-air and felt the need of a grasp upon a root or something to enable me to pull myself down into the shell hole. I was strongly reminded of a slow action moving picture for it seemed an interminable time before I reached the ground.

We gathered our wounded together and shipped them off in motor ambulance wagons. Then we buried the dead, one of whom had just joined in the last draft, and was now dead before he had ever seen the front line. I had known him previously. His name was Clarkson.³ In civil life he had been a C.P.R. trainman, either a conductor or engineer, I forget which, and was a very fine type of man. Years later I met his young daughter, then a normal school student, and was able to tell her the circumstances of her father's death.

The season was advancing and the evenings were drawing in. Darkness came appreciably earlier than during our last tour of duty in the line. At 7 p.m. Petty and I left for the front line with his signallers and my orderlies. We went in past the ruins of the sugar factory that had played a part in the action of the 15th, and headed for Courcellette. Enemy shelling was fairly brisk, and we were forced to take shelter several times. At 9:30 we reached a deep German dugout in Courcellette and cleared it for our Regimental Aid Post. There were two entrances, the chief one being on the end next to the enemy. It was a fine roomy dugout, and one end had been used as a storehouse for German bombs of the potato masher shape. We threw out enough of these to give us room for our purpose. Heavy shelling still continued. The attack was ordered for 12:35 p.m. the following day.

2 Shrapnel shells, which exploded in the air, were directional, producing a cone-shaped forward pattern, rather than scattering their lethal pellets in all directions. They were particularly used in the creeping barrages that immediately preceded the advancing infantry during an attack. — P B.

3 Pte. Lorne Clarkson, killed in action, Sept. 25, 1916, age 38. Wigney, 137.

At 6 a.m. on September 26 the morning was fine and warm. Shelling was quiet and we had no casualties in the night. At 11:30 Captain Sawley was sent out with a bullet wound of the arm. Otherwise the forenoon was uneventful and peaceful, the calm before the storm. At 12:35 p.m. our artillery bombardment for the attack began, and the enemy counter-barrage came back almost instantaneously. I was told later that our barrage missed the German front line completely, but cannot vouch for the accuracy of this report. By 2 p.m. the wounded were coming in, and the stream continued throughout the afternoon. Some of the casualties arriving were severely wounded, most of them by shell fire. The artillery fire was tremendous on both sides.

Late in the afternoon Teddy Barnes was brought down from the line on a stretcher. His leg was torn off at the knee. Wolfenden, another stretcher bearer of D Company, was with him when he was hit and lost no time in having him carried to the dressing post. Poor Wolfenden was nearly frantic with grief because of the terrible wound of his pal. I could see at a glance that Teddy was unlikely to recover. He had lost much blood and his face was deathly white; yet he was the coolest of the party. I loosened the tourniquet for a moment, redressed the stump of the thigh, and sent the carrying party straight out to find the collecting post for the field ambulance. Of course I had no right to send these men out of the line, but I was determined that if there was even a remote chance of saving Teddy's life he should have it. As I bid farewell his eyes were as unwavering and his grip as firm as though nothing had happened. As he shook hands with me and said that he was sorry to leave in the middle of an action, I had to exert all the will power I possessed to prevent myself breaking into a fit of weeping. After the lapse of so many years I can still see him lying on the stretcher with apparently every drop of blood drained from his features but still retaining his cheerful voice and expression.

It was now quite evident that things had not gone well with us. No German prisoners appeared, and the steady stream of casualties continued. Our dugout, which was in the form of a tunnel and of good size, was rapidly filling with stretcher cases. I sent out urgent messages for help to clear our post, for the whole area was exposed to shelling and machine gun fire, and I was anxious for the safety of the lying wounded that we might not be able to shelter in the tunnel. I utilized walking wounded to help carry out the lying cases in order to keep down the congestion as much as possible. At 6 p.m. I had definite news that our attack had been repulsed with fearful casualties. By this time our dugout

was full of wounded, and in spite of the number we had passed through there were three stretcher cases lying in the trench at the door of our dugout. By now we had only one entrance left, the other having been blown in and completely obstructed.

As darkness came on the event that I had feared ensued. The enemy subjected the village to an intense concentrated bombardment. It seemed to us in the aid post that all the shells were aimed at our dugout, but as a matter of fact no portion of the village was especially favoured. It was during this period that a dugout containing the headquarters of the 13th Battalion was blown up with many resulting casualties. Among others the battalion's commanding officer Lieut.-Col. Buchanan was killed.⁴ When the heavy bombardment began we attempted to get in the three stretcher cases from the trench at the entrance. One of these managed to walk out and Willis brought in one of the others. When we returned for the remaining one he had vanished completely. A large shell hole was close by and the stretcher was overturned. Whether the wounded man had crawled away or had been blown to pieces we never knew.

The rain of shells continued until late into the night and the light and sound effects were those of a severe thunderstorm. With every severe concussion from a close hit, all our candles were extinguished and had to be relighted to enable us to carry on with our work. In the middle of the turmoil we received word that a wounded man was lying out in the roadway close to the dugout. It was black dark outside except for the light of the bursting shells. Willis took out a group of walking wounded with him to look for the man. The party returned in a few minutes with Sergeant Tripp of the 27th Battalion who was badly wounded. I was greatly relieved to see them return, for I had had grave doubts of their surviving the hell-let-loose raging outside. I may explain here that the route taken by water and rationing carrying parties to the line of battle passed close to our dugout and throughout the action we secured our water supply by salvaging the tins dropped by those killed or wounded while on their way. It was about this time that a survivor – perhaps the only one – of the explosion in the 13th Battalion Headquarters took refuge for a moment in our dugout. He waited for a few minutes to recover from the effects of the explosion and then went outside again.

The wounded kept coming in all through the night, and we resorted to the most desperate expedients to pass them on to the field ambulance

4 Lieut.-Col. Victor Carl Buchanan, killed in action, September 24, 1916, age 47. Wigney, 96.

collecting post and thus keep our aid post as little encumbered with wounded as possible. My chief object was to keep the number of wounded on hand at any one time down to the minimum because of the severity of the shelling. All night Willis, in addition to his other duties, kept a kettle of water on the primus stove and furnished every wounded man with a cup of hot tea.

We did not know it at the time, but the reason for the extraordinary enemy artillery activity was that our battalion, reinforced by two companies of the 27th Battalion, was renewing the attack on the German trenches. They captured the objective on the third attempt during the night. At 10 p.m., just after Willis had rescued Sergeant Tripp, a direct hit of a heavy shell over our remaining entrance smashed it in. The top of the door frame was a huge baulk of timber about a foot square. This was snapped like a match, but the fragments and the overlying chalk wedged before they reached the floor, leaving an opening about three feet in height through which we crawled during the remainder of our occupancy.

The wounded behaved splendidly, and many a man with ghastly wounds, but able to walk, went out helping to carry a stretcher bearing a companion still more severely wounded. Under less desperate circumstances they would have been classified as stretcher cases themselves. One man with a smashed shoulder volunteered to use his sound arm to carry a corner of a stretcher.

September 27 presented a clear sky at 6:00 in the morning. By daylight we had a chance to view the results of the night bombardment. The remains of Courcelette above ground had largely disappeared to be replaced by fresh shell holes, and every surface was covered by a thick coating of red brick-dust.

Casualties had been passing through all night, but the thickest of the rush was over. With the coming of daylight and the slackening of shell fire we could work to better advantage, even with the entrance of the dugout half blocked. Captain Bell of the 4th Field Ambulance came early in the day with a party of bearers and took away a man that had been with us all night. He kept his squads busy clearing from our post back to the field ambulance collection station, and as the day passed we began to get the situation well in hand. By 3 p.m. we had our aid post clear for the first time since the beginning of the action. Lieutenant Mee and Lieutenant Scott came through on stretchers, the latter shot through the pelvis and already showing signs of beginning peritonitis. At 4 p.m. I organized a party of carriers and sent them up to the front line. I

think Willis went in charge. They returned with six stretcher wounded and reported six more still lying there. By nightfall the field ambulance people had cleared all our wounded except for four that we kept for the night.

Although we had reached our objective the exact position of our front was still obscure. When the situation had seemed at its worst the night before, and an enemy counter-attack was a possibility, Lieut.-Col. Bell and most of the Battalion Headquarters' staff had moved up to the firing line. All afternoon one of our airplanes flew back and forth very low over our forward area endeavouring to obtain exact information as to the position of our front line. It kept calling repeatedly for signals by a plaintive dirge-like honking of its horn. Our men were supposed to mark their position on the ground by setting out Bengal flares, but I presume that these signals had been lost during the desperate fighting in the night. Anyway the communications failed to connect, and the airplane continued to fly back and forth for all the world like a huge bird in search of its lost flock. Why it was not shot down I cannot imagine, unless it was that the enemy had fallen back much farther than we believed at the time. That he had gone back a considerable distance was proved by a patrol made by two of our scouts, Curtis and Langtry, who explored the empty trenches well in advance of the line upon which we had halted. The only enemy they encountered was one that they found fast asleep. He had been left behind when the others had retreated. Our scouts brought him in as an exhibit with their report.

The night of September 27-28 was fairly quiet with only a few walking wounded coming through. I was able to wrap myself in my greatcoat and snatch a few intervals of sleep. At daybreak the bearers of the 6th Field Ambulance cleared out our remaining stretcher cases. At 7 a.m. a stretcher party was sent up to the front line to bring out any wounded that still might be there. The party returned with the gratifying report that all lying cases had been evacuated during the night. In the course of the forenoon the M.O. of the 26th Battalion arrived with two orderlies with the news that their battalion was pushing on through our battalion which occupied the old German front line. On the whole the day was comparatively quiet, although there was still considerable shelling. A few wounded kept coming in, chiefly from the 26th Battalion. At 6 p.m. the enemy once more turned an intense artillery and machine gun fire on the village. The entrance to our dugout, which faced the enemy, was well peppered once more. At 7 p.m. we sent a party up to the front line

to bring out any lying wounded. We kept one stretcher and one walking wounded in the aid post overnight. At midnight a light rain was falling.

By the morning of September 29 our battalion had been relieved by the 22nd Battalion, and had moved back to Tara Valley near Albert. At 7 a.m. we turned over the Regimental Aid Post to Captain Cruickshank, the medical officer of the 26th Battalion, and left Courcelette with a few stretcher bearers and other details that had been left behind. Personally, I had sustained no injury except a sprain of one of my ankles. This, with a bruise that I received on September 15 on the same leg, made me quite lame, but I was able to walk well enough to leave Courcelette behind me. We made an early start in the morning, for my watch was running fast. The side of the case had received a dent from a shell fragment at some time during the action. The fact that it gained time rapidly as the result was perhaps not surprising.

At 9:30 we rejoined what was left of the 31st Battalion gathered at Tara Valley. A light rain was falling. A few dummy tanks made of canvas marked our bivouac. The first news I heard from our orderly room was that Sergeant Barnes had died of his wounds in the dressing station at Albert.⁵ His name appeared in the orders of the day as having been granted the Military Medal for gallant conduct on September 15. Although the news of Barnes' death did not surprise me, it caused me profound depression, and further evil tidings were to come. The two slight casualties who reported were sent to the field ambulance.

September 30 was cloudy but without rain. This latter circumstance was fortunate as we were without shelter. It was a gloomy enough day, and I doubt if any of the survivors in the unit have ever been able to divest their minds of the depressing memories. I held a sick parade at 9 a.m. and found five slightly wounded that had not reported previously. This was the usual experience after a heavy engagement: men who went through the action wounded kept turning up for several days following. We spent the day shaking ourselves together and checking our losses. The latter were sickening. Of the officers that had gone into action only four: Lieut.-Col. Bell; the adjutant, Captain Hornby; the signalling officer, Lieutenant Petty; and myself, had escaped becoming casualties. The only two company officers remaining with the unit, Captain L'Amey and

5 L/Sgt Edward Barnes, MM, died of wounds, September 26, 1916, age 25. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 35. Barnes, a miner by trade, enlisted at Edmonton in November, 1914.

Lieutenant Hector Kennedy, afterwards D.S.O., had sustained slight wounds. They both went to the 4th Field Ambulance for anti-tetanus serum and then returned to duty. Between them they had led the final successful attack.

As I have said, we spent the day in reviewing our situation, checking up on our losses and taking steps towards reorganization. During the action we had treated 103 casualties in our aid post, 32 of whom were stretcher cases. During the day Orderly Room Sergeant Art Wakelyn gave me a summary of our reported casualties in the two big battles of the month. This information was written in pencil on three sheets taken from an army message book, and was a sorrowful document. The substance of this report is given in the following paragraph.

SUMMARY OF CASUALTIES IN THE TWO SEPTEMBER ACTIONS

	Killed		Wounded		Missing	
	Officers	Other Ranks	Officers	Other Ranks	Officers	Other Ranks
Sept. 15	7	56	5	126	1	52
Sept. 26	2	58	11	198	3	110

The following is the list of the officer casualties in the two actions.

Sept. 15. Killed: Major H. M. Splane, Lieut. E. F. Pinkham, Lieut. E. A. Boucher, Lieut. E. A. Sharples, Lieut. E. S. C. Conrad, Lieut. L. R. Swain, and Lieut. E. T. Toole.

Wounded: Lieut. F. P. D. Newland, Lieut. A. D. Foster, Lieut. J. Millington, Lieut. J. L. MacPherson, and Lieut. F. M. Holden.

Missing: Lieut. A. F. Keyes.

Sept. 26. Killed: Lieut. C. Gordon, Lieut. J. F. Arbuckle.

Wounded: Lieut. H. Kennedy (still on duty), Lieut. A. C. Hanson, Lieut. H. P. Morgan, Lieut. H. N. Simpson, Lieut. W. D. Friend, Lieut. J. N. Mee, Lieut. G. H. Scott, Lieut. J. F. Clement, Capt. A. L. B. Johnson, Capt. H. Sawley, and Capt. J. H. L'Amy (still on duty).

Missing: Major J. S. Gilker, Lieut. V. J. L. Eccles, and Lieut. E. C. Thom.

Of the 31 officer casualties, 15 were now known to be dead. Three officers wounded on September 26, Lieutenant G. H. Scott, Lieutenant H. N. Simpson and Captain A. L. B. Johnson, afterwards died of wounds.

One officer, MacPherson, first reported wounded on September 15, was now reported missing, believed killed. I have already recounted the circumstances of his disappearance. Major Gilker, Lieutenant Eccles, and Lieutenant Thom reported missing after the second action, were all killed.

Anyone who had been through a harrowing experience, such as a fire in a building or a train wreck, involving the taking of close friends or relatives, will be able to appreciate the feelings of those of us who had come through the ordeal of these two battles. Fortunately a number of the missing were later reported wounded in various hospitals. As another set off to the effect of our severe losses the officers and men who had been held out of action as a nucleus for reorganization now rejoined us, and we began to feel like a fighting unit once more. Among those who rejoined us was our ever-cheerful second in command, Major Hewgill. I also remember that Lieutenant Franks, who afterwards joined our unit, paid us a visit while we were in bivouac at Tara Valley.

Among the fallen were many of our original veteran N.C.O.s and men, including Sergeants McRae and Boulden who had come back to the unit with the latest draft. We thought and talked of all these things, and of the fortunes of war, as we sat around the dummy tanks in our bivouac.⁶

6 *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.* 170, contains the following commendation: "No report of the fighting on the Somme would be complete without a reference to the splendid work done by Captain H. W. McGill, the Battalion Medical Officer. Throughout both actions he rendered excellent service, dealing with the problems involved in the large number of casualties in a most efficient manner. In the second action, in particular, his achievement in maintaining a Regimental Aid Post in the village of Courcellette throughout the whole of the fighting and under heavy shell-fire was most inspiring."

XVIII AFTER THE BATTLE

O, that way madness lies; let me shun that
No more of that.

– Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act III, Scene IV

On the afternoon of September 30 I walked down to the division's main dressing station in Albert. This had been an exceedingly busy place during the preceding few days. While I was there a badly wounded man was brought in with a tourniquet still constricting his shattered leg and making an amputation imperative as gangrene was beginning below the constriction. One of the medical officers present expressed in round terms his censure upon the unknown man who had applied the tourniquet and left it on. I admonished him not to be too hasty, and pointed out that the unknown man who had taken steps to prevent the casualty bleeding to death had probably been dead himself a few minutes later. In discussing the situation with the Colonel that evening I reverted to the subject of Barnes and reproached myself for not having kept him out of the action in spite of his entreaties. I remember as clearly as though the incident had occurred a week ago the Colonel reaching over and placing his hand upon my knee.

"Doctor," he said, "stop at once. If you allow yourself to get thinking along that line you will go stark raving mad. In a game like this one must be content to make the dispositions of his forces that seem most judicious at the time. All else is in the lap of the gods, and any after reproaches are not only futile but dangerous."

I tried to follow the Colonel's advice thereafter, and upon the whole was successful. However, I still often recall Barnes' going into action out of his turn, and of Arbuckle's delight in being able to catch up with his unit in time to meet his death the next day.¹ Moreover, nothing that I encountered during the next two years of war did such violence to my feelings as did the series of shocking experiences on the Somme. Among

1 Lieut. John Farabee Arbuckle, killed in action, September 26, 1916. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 17. Arbuckle had been promoted from the ranks. He was wounded at St. Eloi in April and had convalesced in England.

all my vivid recollections of over three years under fire that sombre tragic month on the Somme stands out clear and stark as a period of unalloyed horror, violence and sorrow.

October began with a bright clear morning. We all put our watches back one hour in changing from daylight saving time, which we had been using, to standard time. At sick parade I found still more casualties late reporting, and sent two to the 4th Field Ambulance for anti-tetanus serum. In the evening the 6th Brigade relieved the 5th in the Courcellette area. The 31st Battalion remained in brigade reserve and took position near Brigade Headquarters, at the north end of Sausage Valley, close to the point where we had been quartered before the battle of September 15. We marched out of bivouac at 5:30 p.m. and finished the journey at 9:00. There was a little canvas shelter for the orderly room, but most of us found sleeping quarters where we could in more or less habitable dugouts. Petty and I established ourselves in a small burrow dug into the side of an old trench. The side next to the trench was open so we closed it with a piece of blanket or piece of canvas. There was just room inside for the two of us to lie down.

Before we settled ourselves for the night, the enemy began breaking shrapnel overhead, and the unfortunate L'Amy was shot through the cheek. I bandaged up his face and then took him into the little shelter where the Colonel was sitting.

It was now quite dark and a candle was burning inside the shelter. Several officers were present. It seemed a heartless thing for them to do, but when L'Amy appeared from the darkness, a grotesque figure with his face swathed in white bandages, they all set up a laugh. When L'Amy expressed his intention of still carrying on the Colonel would have none of it.

"For Heaven's sake, L'Amy," he said, "get out of here before you are killed. Apparently the enemy has your number and will likely achieve his fell purpose in the next attempt. But before you go, have a drink for good luck."

L'Amy's face was nearly covered with dressings, but there was a small opening at the margin giving access to his mouth. Into this aperture the neck of a bottle was thrust and a quantity of reviving liquid allowed to trickle through. At this exhibition of hospitality accepted under difficulty, the heartless laughter once more broke forth. Tragedy and comedy are never far apart, and are often inextricably mixed. After L'Amy secured his drink he departed for the field ambulance. He was a Channel Islander, and the last I heard of him was that he had returned

to his native soil and was living the life of a laird, or whatever they call a laird in that interesting part of the Empire.

Rain poured all day on October 2, and as our living conditions were not too comfortable, Petty and I devised a scheme for keeping the wet and mud out of our funk hole. We obtained a bunch of sand bags, and each time we returned to our "home" we pulled a pair of these over our muddy boots. It was surprising how clean and dry we kept our quarters.

The district had changed considerably since we first came into the area early in September. It was now the site of a number of heavy gun and howitzer batteries. To the south, on top of the hill leading down into the valley and just north of La Boisselle was a battery of two 9.2 howitzers. Half way up Sausage Valley a French heavy howitzer had its position, and on the bank where Petty and I had our dugout, almost over our heads, a British 60-pounder gun² was in action most of the time. I paid visits to all these sites during the few days we were in the area. The 9.2 battery was in action when I visited there, and it was interesting to me to stand behind the guns and watch the shell after each discharge, high in the air and travelling towards the German line. My blessing went with every one of them. When I visited the French battery, I tried to converse with the battery sergeant, but as I could not speak French, and he was equally deficient in English, we made little progress although I understood him when he said, "Il'y a beaucoup de bombardement, ici."

The rain continued until the afternoon of October 3 and by this time the roads were in vile condition. Enemy artillery was fairly active, but fortunately we had no further casualties. I noticed a 9.2 howitzer being moved forward with a caterpillar tractor, and concluded that the battery in front of La Boisselle was advancing its position. We were relieved by the 9th Brigade that evening and, after paying our final adieu to the Somme battle front, our unit moved back to the bivouac area on Albert Brickfields. Lieut.-Col. Bell and I were among the last to leave. The transport section had brought up our horses, and we rode out together.

It was quite dark when the Colonel and I started out. Just as we crested the hill at the south end of the valley and approached the battery position, one of the howitzers fired. As I was under the impression that the other howitzer had been moved, I said to the Colonel, "I think, Sir, if we hurry we shall be able to get past before the gun has time to reload, for there is only one there."

2 A large field artillery piece firing an approximately 60-pound shell. The gun was the equivalent of the German 15-centimetre gun.

We spurred our mounts into a trot, but just as we were opposite the battery the other howitzer blared right in our faces. The one I had seen on the move belonged to another unit. For a moment I was stunned by the explosion and blinded by the flash. When I recovered my senses the little mare I was riding was trotting along contentedly as though nothing had happened. She was well used to the sounds of war by this time and I do not suppose she even wagged her ears when the gun went off within a few feet of her nose.

We spent the night on the Brickfields. There was a heavy rain the next morning which ceased shortly after noon. We marched away at 1:30 and reached a camp of tents near Warloy at 4:00 in the afternoon. In the Casualty Clearing Station at Warloy I talked with the medical officer who had operated upon Lieutenant Scott, and learned that the gallant officer was dead.³ There was something unusually sad concerning Scott. He had been granted a special leave because of his fine work with the sacrifice patrol on September 15, but before he could take advantage of this it had been cancelled. Why these leave warrants were issued and then cancelled I have never been able to determine. I cannot think that the cutting off of leave was often really necessary, and I do know the practice was responsible for some of the most poignant tragedies of the war.

The battalion rested in camp at Warloy during October 5 and rain fell all of that night. At 10:15 the next morning we marched out for our old half-way house, the village of La Vicogne, where we went into billets that afternoon. At 10 a.m. on the morning of October 7 we left and after a march of three hours through picturesque country we reached the little village of Pernois, situated on the high north bank of the Nièvre river valley. Here we went into billets and rain began to fall soon after.

At Pernois we were joined by a few of our old officers who had been absent from the battalion on courses of instruction or for other reasons during the Battle of the Somme. Major Doughty, I recall, was among those returning. Their arrival cheered us up very much. Another cheering event was the issue of heavy grey wool sweaters to all ranks. These were particularly welcome, for the nights were becoming quite chilly with the approach of winter. Also, there was an allotment of one special leave for the battalion. Lieut.-Col. Bell was good enough to grant this to

3 Lieut. George Herbert Scott, MC, died of wounds, September 28, 1916, age 31. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 671. Scott was the officer whose abdominal wound showed signs of peritonitis when Harold McGill examined him at the Regimental Aid Post on September 27.

the M.O. Perhaps he thought I needed it. Anyway I was determined not to repeat the experience of poor Scott, and made active preparations for a quick get-away. At noon, October 8, I visited the Assistant Director of Medical Services at Canaples and arranged for my relief. I held sick parade at 7 a.m., October 9, and during the afternoon was relieved by Captain Kennedy of the 6th Field Ambulance. My train was due to leave Amiens, nearly 20 miles away, at 5 p.m., and I did not have much time to lose. I put the few necessities into my pack and was ready to start after lunch.

One of my transport drivers took me in the mess cart to the junction of the main Amiens road and a little beyond. When we were in sight of the city he turned back, and I took to the road with my pack expecting to walk the remainder of the distance. I had not gone far before I was overtaken by a Red Cross car which took me right into the city. Otherwise I might have missed my train. At this time Amiens was a bustling busy city. I had never been there before and hadn't the faintest idea of where the station was – an important question as it was nearly 5 p.m. I met a young French soldier dressed in the smart horizon-blue uniform, and decided to obtain the necessary information from him. He came smartly to attention the moment I spoke to him, and listened politely and patiently while I tried to explain what I wanted in my smattering of French. Finally he understood, and replied in perfect English without a shade of accent, "Take the second street to the right, Sir."

At this, I could not refrain from laughing out, and my informant politely joined in. Up to that point, though, not a flick of an eyelash or a twitch of facial muscle betrayed that he detected anything ridiculous in the situation or anything wanting in my efforts to speak French. I soon found the station, but learned that the train I wanted left from another, the Gare St. Roch. I hurried off in search of this place and again had to enquire my way. I accosted a well-dressed gentleman with a long black beard. This time I had only to repeat, "Ou est le Gare St. Roch?" When the monsieur learned that the train was to leave at "cinq heures," he turned about face and accompanied me almost to the door of the station, all the time urging me to hurry and gesticulating with his cane. Truly the French are a polite people. Certainly the two whom I met on this occasion left nothing to be desired on that score. When I next visited Amiens two years later on the eve of the great battle of that name the houses were all closed and the civilians gone.

The leave train, as usual, was late in starting and I had plenty of time to get on board. This train went only to Rouen where one would take the Paris express for Le Havre the following day. I shared a compartment

with a French officer and a British artillery major. It was too dark for us to see the country through which we were passing. The French officer and I attempted a conversation on military topics, but the difficulty of language somewhat restricted our interchange of ideas. The train reached Rouen before midnight whereupon the British major and I went to the Hôtel d'Angleterre where we found good accommodation. We took the Paris express for Le Havre the following forenoon and reached our destination in a short time. It was a real pleasure to travel on a fast up-to-date train once more.

We went to the officers' club in Le Havre and the artillery officer and I spent most of the day together. As the leave boat was not due to depart until midnight, I went on board just before that hour. There were not many passengers on leave, and the ship was a little packet scarcely wider than an ordinary room. A near gale was blowing, and the wind was screeching through the rigging. The steward asked me if I would like something to eat, and upon my assenting served me a nice supper in the Captain's dining salon on the upper deck. I remember he moved me to another seat because, as he explained, the latter belonged to the "Old Man." Just after the boat cast off the skipper came in and had his own supper.

There were no berths to be had, and it was necessary for me to make the best of the night. I went down to the deck below, spread out a few cork life preservers for a bed and went to sleep. My sleep was soon disturbed. I dreamed that I was back in the Courcelette dugout and could hear the swish and burst of shells overhead. In my nightmare I was trying to dodge these. Presently I came wide awake and discovered the real cause of my distress.

We were now well into the Channel and beyond the shelter of the breakwater. At times the little boat seemed to be standing on her nose, and a succession of waves were sweeping the upper deck. It had been the noise and shock of these that had made me dream of shells. Worse than that I was now, for the first and last time in my life, afflicted with a deadly sea-sickness. Formerly my theory had been that sea-sickness was largely a product of the imagination, to which those of phlegmatic temperament were immune. On the night of October 10-11, 1916, while crossing the Channel, I abandoned my theory. I had gone to sleep without a thought of "mal de mer" which came upon me as a thief in the night. After my sea-sickness abated somewhat I went to sleep again and did not awaken until we were entering Southampton harbour in the morning.

Needless to say, I lost no time in making my way to London, and was able to book a room at the Cecil Hotel where I had spent my previous leave. The Cecil was quite a rendezvous for Canadians at that time, and I soon began to meet acquaintances. One of them was Captain Dunlop from Calgary. They were all anxious to hear what the tanks looked like, the current papers being full of the accounts of their exploits. Personally, I was more interested in seeing a good show at one of the theatres than in describing the appearance of the tanks, and made enquiries with this end in view. One gentleman gave me first hand information.

"There is a splendid bill at — theatre." he said, naming the play-house, "they are putting on an exhibition of moving pictures depicting the battle of the Somme. Perhaps you would like to see it?"

"*No Thank You*," I replied, "there may be many fine shows in London that I should like to see, but the one showing pictures of the battle of the Somme is not one of them."

As a matter of fact, I think I saw only one show during my leave. It was not until I had a bath and crawled into a clean bed that I began to realize how much the previous month had taken out of me. I spent most of my week of leave in my room at the hotel. I have an idea that I was running a temperature most of the time. The one show I attended was "The Byng Boys Are Here" in which George Robey was starring. Years afterwards I met Mr. Robey when he was on a Canadian tour and was able to tell him of the occasion when I first saw him in London. His show was making a wonderful hit at the time, and the members of the Canadian Corps were known as The Byng Boys as a divided compliment to their distinguished leader, and to Robey's show.

Altogether I had a rather unexciting leave but secured a good rest. I took one short trip out of town. I went out to Taplow to visit Colonel Mewburn, and in the evening went on to Reading where I spent the night as the guest of Dr. J. E. Palmer of Calgary, who was doing work in the Royal Berkshire Hospital. I did not visit the institution that was the scene of the famous "Ballad of Reading Gaol."⁴ I returned to London the following day.

On October 18 I began my return journey for the front. It had taken me two days to reach England. Four days were occupied in returning to my unit in France. It was a very dreary journey indeed. I sailed from

4 Oscar Wilde composed the ballad after serving a sentence of two year's hard labour at Reading Gaol for being convicted in 1895 of a homosexual offence under the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

Southampton late at night and sat up in the cabin on the upper deck until we reached Le Havre in the early hours of the morning. All night long the ship's gramophone kept grinding out the song selections from "The Bing Boys Are Here." I remained in Le Havre all day, as the leave train did not depart until evening. I again made the officers' club my headquarters, and there met Major Jones of the 18th Battalion who was also returning from leave. We boarded the leave train after dark and were each issued a tin of bully beef and a bag of hard tack as rations to sustain us on our way. We travelled to Rouen during the night and spent the following day visiting the points of interest in that historic city, among them the beautiful cathedral and the scene of Joan of Arc's execution. At night the Le Havre experience was repeated, and we departed on the night leave train with a fresh issue of iron rations. The weather was bitterly cold for the season of the year and we nearly perished in the unheated train. Fortunately the officer in charge of the leave train, an old retired artillery colonel, had a private car at the rear end. He had his orderly make and serve us hot tea which helped considerably. We made Étaples on the second night and had part of a day to wait there. However the progress speeded up a little, for we got a train out of Étaples before nightfall. This landed us in St. Pol late at night and I found a good bed in an officers' rest station. It was the first time I had been able to remove my clothes since leaving England. St. Pol was a very important railway centre within the war zone, and I counted upon reaching my unit the following day. I obtained a fairly good breakfast in a French eating place, and soon after took the train for Barlin where I had been told our divisional headquarters were located.

Between the towns of St. Pol and Barlin the railroad passed through the considerable town of Bruay, an important military point throughout the war. This terrain differed markedly in appearance from both Flanders and the Somme country, the scenes of our former adventures. It was rough, hilly country, intersected with valleys and streams. It was the Black Country of France, or at least that part of the colliery region not occupied by the enemy. After the train passed Bruay I could see on all sides evidence of the coal mining industry; tall chimneys belching black smoke, high tipples and towers for hoisting machinery and, disfiguring the landscape everywhere, the huge, black pyramidal shaped slag heaps. The ugliness of these features was relieved by many stretches of fine, carefully nurtured forest. It was for the preservation of this precious piece of their country that the French had fought so desperately in the early part of the summer of 1915.

XIX THE SOUCHEZ SECTOR

Look on thy country, look on fertile France,
And see the cities and the towns defaced
By wasting ruin of the cruel foe!

– Shakespeare, *King Henry VI*, Part I, Act III, Scene III

While I had been on leave, the 2nd Division had moved north from the Somme into the Lens area, and the 6th Brigade was now holding the Souchez sector of the line. This I learned at Barlin, and also that the 31st Battalion horse lines were in the village of Coupeigny two or three miles to the east. I managed to get a ride there on a motor lorry, and among the first soldiers I saw on the street was Macqualter, one of my water squad. Macqualter told me that the battalion was out of the line in brigade support and billeted in the ruined village of Ablain-St. Nazaire. The transport was to go up at night, but I decided not to wait, and started out to walk the distance of some nine miles. I filled my water bottle and started off with my pack on my back.

My course took me straight south at the beginning, up a very steep hill and on over the higher ground to the village of Grand Servins. Here the road turned to the east. After passing through Gouy Servins the road ran nearly due east with a slight bearing to the south. It gradually descended into a valley contained on the north by a steep ridge of high ground that lay parallel to the road.

The country was all strange to me so I stopped a farmer whom I met and enquired the way to Souchez. The farmer assured me that I was on the right road, and added that in his opinion Souchez was “non bon,” an opinion with which I was to concur most heartily afterwards.

As I proceeded down the road another high steep ridge appeared before me, running at right angles, and apparently blocking the valley down which the road descended. Darkness was coming on, and I was beginning to worry over the prospect of having to climb up the hill ahead of me when I came suddenly into the ruined village of Ablain-St. Nazaire. I soon found the battalion mess which was located in the cellar of a house that had been wiped away by shell fire. There I learned for the first time that the ridge parallel to the road was the famous Notre Dame

de Lorette Spur, and that the one in front was the equally famous Vimy Ridge, known in this sector as the "Pimple."¹ I was assured that my fears of having to cross this ridge were quite uncalled for, as in the existing state of affairs on the Western front it would be impossible for me to do this alive, the Ridge being in possession of the enemy. This is the region of the furious fighting that occurred in the early spring of 1915, when the French drove the Germans off of the Notre Dame de Lorette Spur, and established themselves on the western slopes of Vimy Ridge, although they were never able to capture the crest.

The next morning I visited the Souchez sugar refinery ruins, frequently referred to in the war dispatches of that date, and the site of the obliterated village of Souchez. I also made a tour of support trenches we were holding on the eastern end of Notre Dame de Lorette.

The 2nd Division had now moved, as it were, into winter quarters. Our season of active campaigning was over for the time being, and we again held a static position as a trench garrison. The disposition of the troops was much as it was the previous winter on the Kemmel front. Each brigade carried out its own reliefs, and in each the battalion concerned returned to the same section of the trenches as before. The support battalion held the trenches on Notre Dame de Lorette Spur and occupied cellars in the village of Ablain-St. Nazaire. The only structure left standing above ground here was the walls of a rather fine old church, the subject of many a photograph and sketch. The unit in reserve was quartered in huts in Noulette Wood, not far behind the line on the north side of the Spur.

After I rejoined the battalion the hard frost relaxed, and we had several days of rain. We occupied this area for the next three months, doing the usual in and out tours of duty as we had done the year before. It is not my intention to give a detailed account of all these movements, but several incidents occurred that are perhaps worth recording.

Sometimes on misty days when the enemy observation from the Pimple was cut off, and when the battalion was in support, I would take a walk over the scene of the 1915 fighting on Notre Dame de Lorette. Evidently the dead had never been buried, and in places the ground was covered ankle deep in bones and equipment of all kinds, French and German. Once I saw a skull floating on the water that filled a shell hole.

1 The "Pimple" was the second highest point on Vimy Ridge.

On another occasion I came across a Massey Harris binder with the grain table bent into an almost complete circle. A shell had exploded under it.

On October 28 we relieved the 28th Battalion in the left Souchez sector of the front line. The trenches were much superior to those we had occupied in Belgium the year before. The main communication trench was known as Ration Trench, and the chief support trench, called Headquarters Trench, ran parallel to the front line and just far enough behind it to be beyond the range of enemy mortars. Battalion Headquarters and the Regimental Aid Post were at the junction of these two principal trenches. There were a number of deep dugouts here, driven well down into the chalk subsoil and securely timbered. The aid post itself was a surface structure; but across the trench and directly opposite, was a deep dugout that offered us a safe retreat in case of heavy shelling. Both of these main trenches were well revetted and furnished with duck-boards as flooring. Altogether the possibilities of comfort for the troops were much greater than in the mud and slush of Belgium. Besides, our proximity to the coal fields was a desirable feature of our position.

After a year of war experience and being adequately equipped with machine guns, the infantry was now enabled to hold a trench position with a much greater economy in human life. Here we held the front line lightly with outposts and machine guns, while the balance of the garrison occupied deep dugouts in the support lines. The front was protected to a further degree by saps, or connecting trenches, run out to bombing posts in No Man's Land. The result was that our casualties bore no comparison to those we had suffered the previous winter.

At 4:30 p.m. on October 28 I arrived at the aid post and took over from the medical officer of the 28th Battalion. This was a new officer, as Captain Cullum had transferred from the C.A.M.C. to the infantry strength of his battalion. On October 31 I attended the Divisional Gas School at Boyeffles and was issued one of the new box respirators and given instructions as to its use. On the night of November 2 we had a man killed and one slightly wounded with a trench mortar bomb. Trench mortar warfare was quite active on this front, but for the reasons stated we escaped heavy casualties.

We were relieved by the 28th Battalion the next day and moved back to dry comfortable huts in Noulette Wood, situated a short distance west of the Souchez Aix-Noulette road and north of Notre Dame de Lorette Spur. At 1:15 a.m. on the morning of November 6, I was called to see a

man who had become ill on a working party. I found him suffering from acute appendicitis and sent him to the field ambulance at once. This was the first case I had seen in the army.

Nothing of particular note occurred until November 9, the day we were to return to the trenches. At 11:30 a.m. the Bois de Noulette was heavily shelled, and we had a man, A. E. Franklin, killed.² At 1:45 in the afternoon I left for the front line and took over the Regimental Aid Post at 3 p.m. It was a fortunate move for us. The 28th Battalion had scarcely taken our place at Noulette before the Germans again shelled the camp, inflicting severe casualties. Among the victims was my friend and associate, Captain Cullum, who was instantly killed.³ Thereafter the high command decided that the site was too close to the front for a reserve camp and selected Bouvigny Wood, some miles to the rear, as quarters for the unit in reserve. This camp also consisted of huts, but the billets of the battalion headquarters officers were in the forester's lodge and were quite comfortable. We had one man killed during this tour of duty.

November 14 was a cold cloudy day with a northeast wind and the gas alert was on. At 4 p.m. a flock of wild geese flew over the lines, and both our men and the Germans opened fire on them. One bird fell behind our lines in the 4th Brigade area. I never learned who ate the goose. On November 15 we returned to Ablain St.-Nazaire and it was while we were here that the tidings of the Hon. Sir Sam Hughes' retirement reached us. Two days later I rode to Barlin and called on Colonel Fotheringham. I did not find him bowed down with grief at this recent news from Canada.⁴

2 Pte. Albert Edward Franklin, killed in action, November 9, 1916, age 25. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 254.

3 Captain John Arthur Cullum, M.C.*/CdG(f), 28th Battalion., died of wounds, November 10, 1916, age 37. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 170. The Military Cross with asterisk (bar) means that he was awarded the Military Cross twice. CdG(f) indicates the French award, Croix de Guerre. On October 10 Capt. Cullum resigned from the C.A.M.C. and transferred to the infantry as a Lieutenant. One month later, he was mortally wounded while out of the lines, in the mess hut at Noulette Wood. A random shell crashed through the roof. He refused immediate attention, claiming that his wounds were not serious, and insisted the other two wounded officers be treated first. Lieutenant Cullum died in the ambulance, before reaching the hospital. Captain R. J. Manion, M.C., *A Surgeon in Arms* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1918), 180–81.

4 Harold McGill to Frances McGill, 12 December 1916. In his letter to Frances, Harold gave vent to his feelings: "I note your remarks re: the downfall of Gen. Sir Sam Hughes. There were certainly no tears shed over here when he went. You expressed a

CEMETERY PLOT OF
CAPTAIN J. A. CULLUM, MC,
IN CORBIE, FRANCE



fear that he did not receive credit for all he had done. He certainly did not; otherwise he would have been tarred and feathered. Any success achieved by the Canadian military has been in spite of him and not because of his activities. He had plenty of energy, I admit, but it was almost entirely misdirected. His infernal personal interference with everything connected with the conduct of the Canadian forces did more to bedevil the business than anything else. He was constantly active in upsetting the program of his own department. Some of his appointments of commanding officers have cost a lot of blood."

The Ottawa press release, dated November 13, read: "It is announced that the Prime Minister has requested, and has received, the resignation of the minister of militia and defence. The retirement of Sir Sam Hughes is in part the outcome of the establishment of the ministry of overseas forces, and in part is due to the assumption by Sir Sam of powers which, in the judgment of the prime minister, can be exercised only by the government as a whole. It is anticipated that the correspondence which brought about the request for the minister's resignation will be made public immediately. It must first be submitted to the governor-general." *Regina Morning Leader*, "Lieut.-Gen. Sir Sam Hughes Was Requested to Resign Office by Premier Borden," 14 November 1916, 1.

On November 21 we again relieved the 28th Battalion in the line and I took over from the M.O., Captain Collins. At 3:30 the following morning a scout and bomber patrol raided the German front line and killed a couple of the enemy, but without securing any prisoners.

It was during one of the tours in the trenches at this period that I had a visit from Captain Manion, in later years Minister of Railways and Canals in the Bennett administration. He was then a doctor with the 6th Field Ambulance.

We were relieved by the 28th Battalion on November 27 and moved back to Bouvigny Wood, Captain Neilson, acting medical officer of the 28th Battalion, took over from me. Just as I reached our headquarters in the wood I met Major Hewgill, and we were entertained by a mine explosion on the Pimple, followed by a brisk artillery bombardment. The huts at Bouvigny Wood were dry and comfortable, but very poorly lighted; and I know nothing more depressing for men than being housed in badly lit quarters.

On December 1, the Assistant Director of Medical services lectured the officers of the 31st Battalion on trench feet, and I followed with a talk on military sanitation. We returned to the line on December 3. At this period we were not particularly busy with casualties; hence my orderlies and I organized a coffee stall in the Regimental Aid Post where we furnished hot coffee to the members of the work parties at night.

According to our calculations of the relief schedule, Christmas would find us in Bouvigny Wood, and preparations were undertaken to provide the troops with something in the way of Christmas cheer. Money was available in the canteen fund, and the committee in charge decided to buy turkeys for all ranks. The dealer with whom negotiations were opened agreed to supply the turkeys, but after the custom of the French would not set a price. However he contracted to furnish the necessary quantity on the specified date at the ruling price of the day. He secured the turkeys from Normandy, and if I remember correctly we paid something like five or six francs per kilo for them. They were good turkeys.

We returned to Bouvigny Wood after our relief in the trenches on December 22. The weather turned warmer and Christmas day was fine and bright with a high southwest wind. All ranks enjoyed the holiday which was a wonderful respite from the dreary round of trench warfare duties, and a pleasant contrast to our celebration, or rather lack of celebration, at Kemmel Shelters the year before. We hired dishes from the French civilians and set the tables in the Y.M.C.A. hut. There were four sittings, one for each company and those not dining served the tables

of those that were. Peace and good will prevailed. Two companies had their dinners on Christmas afternoon, and the other two, the following afternoon. Besides 500 kilograms of turkey, the dinner menu included plum pudding, beer, nuts, raisins and candy. The band rendered musical programs during the dinners, and each night put on a minstrel show which was really a very creditable performance.

It will be recalled that on Christmas, 1915, Major Hewgill bet me a case of whisky that the war would be over before another Christmas came around. When the Somme offensive began in July the Major felt so optimistic that he challenged me to double the stakes, and I accepted the challenge. The Major gallantly paid his wager Christmas morning, and I was in possession of the means of securing and maintaining a slight degree of personal popularity, for a short time at least. But such is the effect of popularity that it was necessary for me to buy a bottle of Scotch to help celebrate the advent of the New Year in the trenches a week later.

December 27 was quite a busy day for us. The weather was warm and sunny. In the forenoon I inspected a reinforcement draft of 55 men. In the afternoon Sir Julian Byng inspected the battalion, and later presented medal ribbons to those that had been awarded decorations.⁵ After these ceremonies, the Corps Commander addressed the unit briefly in terms characterized by the good taste and manner that he invariably displayed upon such occasions. He was accompanied by our recently appointed general of division, Major-General Burstall who succeeded General Turner after the latter had been transferred to the command of the Canadian troops in England.⁶

Heavy rain set in on the night of December 27, and continued at intervals for several days. We encountered the evil effects of the rains upon the trenches when we took over the line on December 28. They began to flood badly and the sides to fall in. Active drainage operations were

5 Harold McGill was among the recipients. Although not mentioned in his memoirs, he had won the Military Cross for service in the field during the September battle of Courcellete. The citation read: "Awarded the 'Military Cross' for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He tended and dressed the wounded under very heavy fire with great courage and determination." *London Gazette*, November 25, 1916.

6 In fact Turner had effectively been removed from command of the 2nd Division in December, 1916. An able administrator, and brave to a fault, he was simply not up to the command of a division, a fact that had been made abundantly clear at St. Eloi and on the Somme. Put in charge of the troops in England, especially their training, he excelled. His replacement, Major-General Henry Burstall, was an artillery officer from the small prewar regular army. — P B.

undertaken and pushed forward. Our artillery announced the birth of the New Year, 1917, at midnight by salvoes from the guns. The rains persisted throughout this tour of duty and required our men to exert constant effort to keep the front line trenches in passable condition. We came out of the line on January 3 and moved to Ablain-St. Nazaire. The rains kept up relentlessly. We returned to the Souchez sector of the front line on January 9 for our last tour of duty in this section, during which tour we had one man killed with a trench mortar bomb.

We had held this line with very few casualties, the majority of these being from trench mortar projectiles. The left section of our line was now very muddy making the mud and the enemy trench mortars the chief sources of our sorrow. One night I had a vivid dream of being stuck in the mud and unable to move. In this position I could see and hear a trench torpedo coming. I was awakened by my terror only to discover that the noise of the imaginary torpedo was Bright peacefully snoring in the other end of the dugout. I never liked the sound of snoring, but it is much preferable to that of a trench mortar or airplane bomb.

One other worry we had was the plague of rats. These infested our dugouts, and would often run across our faces at night. Willis set up a trap, which consisted of a bucket of water, a piece of cheese suspended over the centre of this, and a teeter board balanced over the edge of the bucket. The working theory was that the rat would walk out on this light board in order to get the cheese and overbalance into the water. We kept our acetylene lamp or a candle burning during the night. On one occasion I awoke and saw a large rat trying to secure Willis' cheese. He was too clever to walk out on the shingle prepared for him, but was balancing himself on the edge of the bucket and trying to hook the string with the cheese toward himself with a forepaw. My cane stood at the head of my bunk, and with this I managed to register a direct hit. The rat, however, managed to crawl behind the burlap lining of our walls. Here he gave up the ghost, and until we recovered the body he was a greater offence in death than he had been in life.

The 28th Battalion relieved us on the night of January 14–15. For some reason, probably because of the difficulty of making the relief in the very muddy trenches of our left flank, one officer, two N.C.O.s and 36 other ranks of D Company remained behind in the left section. They came out the following day. I did not leave the aid post until 1:30 on the morning of January 15, and it was two hours later when I reached Bouvigny Wood on a frosty, disagreeable night. I was very tired and lost no time in securing a drink of whisky and crawling between the blankets.

The battalion was under orders to move, as the 2nd Canadian Division was being withdrawn from the line. Snow came during the night of January 16, and a wild storm was in progress next morning when I held sick parade at and inspected the billets. The battalion marched out of Bouvigny Wood at 9:00 and headed westward. Snow was falling fast, driven by a strong northeast wind, and the temperature was falling rapidly. This was a very trying march, as the footing was bad for both men and horses. We reached the village of La Compté at 2 p.m. and took over fairly comfortable billets. The next morning several inches of snow lay on the ground and a mixture of rain and snow was falling. This soon changed to straight snow which fell throughout the day. We remained in billets until the morning of January 19 when we marched out for the village of Ourton, a short distance away on the main St. Pol-Bruay road. There was a hard frost, and the roads were covered with frozen slush.

XX OUT OF THE LINE

Thus sometimes hath the brightest day a cloud;
And after summer evermore succeeds
Barren winter, with its wrathful nipping cold:

– Shakespeare, *King Henry VI*, Part II, Act II, Scene IV

Thus began another phase in the long series of our war experiences. The Division had been withdrawn from the line for training and refitting. We soon settled down to our new duties at Ourton where I instituted a course of instruction and a series of daily lectures to my regular and reserve stretcher bearers sections. The weather remained bitterly cold, and reminded one of a Canadian winter. The temperature must have been below zero Fahrenheit at times, which is cold for sunny France. The billets we took over were fairly good but somewhat scattered. Every morning the water in my wash basin had a thick covering of ice. I made a change of billets. The first one I had was a room at one end of a stable, and the over-powering odour soon drove me to seek new quarters. The new billet was much colder but was free from the stable aroma.

In spite of the cold and heavy snowfall, vigorous training went on. I held my sick parades at 6:30 every morning, and the troops were hard at work after 8:00. At this period one read with mixed feelings of annoyance and amusement the press dispatches describing how the soldiers were enjoying the hardships of the trenches and treating the severe weather as a huge joke. It is true that they bore the sufferings and privations incidental to war and severe weather unflinchingly and without complaint, but to represent them as enjoying the conditions and treating the matter as a joke, is a libel upon their intelligence. Why soldiers, British or others, should be depicted so often as cheerful idiots I have never been able to understand.

Sometimes in the early morning, when I was on my way to or returning from sick parade, I would see the men performing their morning ablutions beside the little ice-choked stream that flowed through the village. Yet, at 8:00 these same men would appear on parade clean shaven and

smartly dressed. During the night of January 26–27 Sergeant Thomas slipped on the ice and fractured a leg.

At the end of January, the 2nd Division vacated the area, and our battalion, complete with transport, moved to the village of Burbure, some ten miles to the northeast in the direction of Béthune. The billets were only fair, and widely scattered, which made sanitation difficult. I inspected these the following day and found that in many cases the men were finding better billets than those officially provided. The village inhabitants were almost invariably kind and friendly and, as was usually the case, our boys established the most amicable relations with the civil population. Captain Burgess of the 5th Field Ambulance called to see me in the afternoon.

A considerable quantity of snow fell during the night of January 31. The next morning I found a couple of cases of mumps from a recent draft on sick parade. In the afternoon, which was bright and sunny, I inspected the billets and found everything in good shape. The men were becoming much smarter under the training they were receiving, and the condition of the billets reflected this improvement. Personally I had benefited by the change of location, for my room was furnished with a stove. I continued my daily instruction of the stretcher bearers. On February 3 we took part in a brigade route march, and that evening the 31st Battalion band gave a good minstrel show in the Y.M.C.A. hut.

The weather continued to be cold with snow storms alternating with periods of clear skies and hard frosts. On February 6 at 9 a.m. the 6th Brigade was inspected by General Burstall, the new commanding officer of the 2nd Division. In the afternoon a photograph was taken of the officers, N.C.O.s and ranks, who had come over to France with the unit in September, 1915. Two days later, I visited the 5th Field Ambulance in Auchel, and talked for the last time to Major Jones of that unit who died on active service a few weeks later.¹

The most undesirable feature of our period of service in the back country was the great shortage of fodder for the transport animals. The issue was extremely scanty. The men of the transport section, who would have preferred going hungry themselves rather than see their horses suffer, were naturally inclined to supplement the hay ration by

1 Major Herbert Jones, C.A.M.C., died of disease (pneumonia), March 5, 1917, age 45. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 384.

any means within their reach. The enforcement of discipline under such conditions becomes an outrage upon one's finer feelings.

On February 10 we began a two-days march back to the line. We reached the village of Houdain in the afternoon and went into billets there. The following day, as we marched to Mont St. Eloy, we passed through the villages of Gauchin Legal, Estrée-Cauchie and Camblain-l'Abbé, all places destined to become very familiar to us in the months to come.

The Corps had now a strength of four full infantry divisions, and we knew that we were selected to take part in the first major operation of the British First Army in the early spring, an operation which included in its objective the capture of Vimy Ridge.² On returning to the line, the 2nd Division took up a position several miles south of where we had spent the autumn and the first part of the winter. We now faced the central part of this famous natural bastion, and at this point a brief description of the area may not be out of place.

Vimy Ridge stretches from the city of Arras several miles to the north. The high ground to the north of the city gradually rises in elevation and defines itself into a distinct ridge, to end at Souchez River as a well-marked spur known as the Pimple. Almost from the beginning the eastern edge drops off abruptly to form an escarpment, beyond which are the plains of Douai where the armies of the great Marlborough encamped more than 200 years ago. The western slope is quite gentle at first but gradually becomes steeper as one goes north until at the end it is almost a cliff.

The enemy occupied all of the crest and our trenches were sited on the western slopes. Behind Vimy Ridge to the west are several considerable elevations of ground, but none as high as the ridge itself. Of these the most important was Mont St. Eloy, crowned by the old Mont St. Eloy monastery which dates from the Spanish days in Artois. This monastery had been destroyed in previous wars, but the high stone tower still stood as a conspicuous landmark for the whole countryside. The Germans had not battered it down, for it was a useful ranging point for their artillery.

Of the artificial features of this terrain the most important from our point of view was the broad, straight road leading from Arras through

² The Canadian Corps would attack on the northern shoulder of a larger British attack. The entire operation was known as the Battle of Arras (subsequently the First Battle of Arras). — P B.

Mont St. Eloy and beyond in a northwesterly direction. Our unit had travelled this road to Mont St. Eloy on February 11. It was called a Roman road, and may have been. It was not difficult for one to believe that Caesar's legions may have marched along this route on their way to the conquest of Britain 2,000 years ago. Apart from its historical associations this highway was of prime interest to us, for it was an essential factor in the supply of our troops occupying the line along the western side of Vimy Ridge. Two first class roads ran along the Ridge; the Arras-Souchez on our side of the line, and the Arras-Lens, most of which lay within the German positions.

We were allotted tolerably comfortable huts behind the hill of Mont St. Eloy. This was quite a busy military point. West of the ruined village was Bois des Alleux, a beautiful beech forest where a detachment of the Canadian Forestry Corps was busy converting the fine trees into timber for military purposes.

On February 12 the 31st Battalion took over the section of the line opposite the village of Écurie, about half way between Neuville St. Vaast and Arras. We relieved the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles and I took over from their medical officer, Captain Ireland, who was later killed at Passchendaele.³ Soon afterwards, I had a man from this unit brought in with compound fractures of both thighs caused by a trench mortar bomb. He died in the Regimental Aid Post. Shelling was very light. We were now in an area known as the Labyrinth which had been the scene of severe fighting in October, 1915.

The weather persisted in severity with bleak northeast winds. The mud was frozen hard, a circumstance actually in our favour because of the effect on the footing in the trenches and on the routes of travel. Nevertheless, we didn't like these trenches. For one thing, the front line was planted with a number of poison gas cylinders, referred to as "rats," in preparation for a gas attack on the enemy opposite. The gas attack did not come off as the wind remained adverse. Meanwhile we felt like a nervous waiter carrying a tray of valuable cut glass down a crowded restaurant floor. At any time there was always a chance that an enemy shell might burst one of our gas drums. Then not only would the liberated gas be carried into our lines by the contrary wind; but the enemy, made aware of the true state of affairs, would concentrate all his batteries within miles upon our position. We felt far from comfortable.

3 Capt. Richard Alfred Ireland, killed in action, October 30, 1917, age 28. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 366.

However, we did not have such a bad tour of it. We had a few casualties from shell fire, trench mortar bombs and rifle grenades, but I do not recall that anyone was killed except the Canadian Mounted Rifles man the day we came in. On February 15 one of my stretcher bearers, Bell, was wounded. Two days later the wind changed to the southwest and a thaw set in, making the trenches greasy with mud. When the unit was in Burbure mumps had been brought to us by a reinforcement draft, and as a result I was forced to send out a number of men who had contracted the disease.

The 27th Battalion relieved us on February 18 and the 31st Battalion marched back to Estrée-Cauchie, a distance of about ten miles. At 2:30 p.m. I turned over the Regimental Aid Post at Écurie to the incoming medical officer and arrived at Mont St. Eloy two hours later. Major Piper and I rode to back to Estrée-Cauchie after dark. As we trotted our horses along the slushy road away from the line, I would occasionally glance back over my shoulder to see the everlasting German flares shooting up into the sky and illuminating the eastern horizon. For a moment I felt that I had never known any other existence or taken part in any scheme of life different from the present, and that the balance of my life would be a continuance of the same sort of thing. I mentioned my thoughts to Major Piper, who replied that his attitude was precisely the same.

The Major and I reached our destination at 9 p.m. and within two hours the battalion had all come in. Estrée-Cauchie was a mediocre village, but I was told that it derived its fancy name from that of one of the many flames of the French King Henry IV. However, I cannot vouch for the truth of this explanation. We remained here six days during which rain fell most of the time. I had the water bottles sterilized and inoculated a number of the men with anti-typhoid vaccine. Cases of mumps continued to appear on parade. On one of my sick parades I found a man with symptoms of cerebrospinal meningitis whom I sent to field ambulance. One afternoon I had a call from Major Moshier and Captain Andrew Mackinnon of the 11th Field Ambulance, whose unit was then located at Quatre Vents, a little hamlet about a mile southeast of Estrée-Cauchie.

On February 24 we returned to Mont St. Eloy, where we took over from the 29th Battalion and occupied the same huts that we had used when we first came into the area on the February 10. The battalion was here six days. I spent my time performing the usual round of routine duties of a medical officer; inspecting billets, holding sick parades,

inoculating troops against typhoid and paratyphoid and in giving instructions in first aid. Cases of mumps still kept reporting so the total temporary loss of strength to the battalion from this cause must have been considerable.

On March 2 the 31st Battalion relieved the 29th Battalion in Brigade support, and was subjected to a rather unusual disposition, the only occasion that such an arrangement was put into effect while I was with the infantry. Seven platoons and Headquarters went to Arian Dump in the rear of the Labyrinth sector. The balance of the unit was broken up into working parties to aid the engineers, or left at the detail camp at Mont St. Eloy. I remained with the latter.

Active preparations were now under way for the great attack on Vimy Ridge, planned to take place early the following month. The engineers were busy preparing roads, light railways, deep dugouts and supply dumps of all kinds. In the area in which we were now operating, large deep dugouts or artificial caves had existed before the advent of war. In quarrying chalk – a soft and easily worked building material which hardened with weathering – the French, with their usual frugality, avoided destroying the surface soil by creating underground quarries. Over many years large quantities had been quarried without disturbing the surface except for the shafts. The result was a number of large artificial caverns, one of which was in the suburbs of Arras while another, known as Zivy Cave, was southeast of Neuville St. Vaast just behind our front line of trenches. The position of Thélus Cave on Vimy Ridge was accurately marked on artillery maps.

Our huts at the detail camp were close to the main road, and during the week we were there we could hear day and night the steady and ceaseless rumble of limbers, lorries and caterpillar tractors moving ammunition, heavy guns and supplies of all kinds forward to the battle zone. The main road, which was disintegrating under the combined effects of this heavy traffic and the thaw following the hard frosts, required the constant efforts of the engineers and labour battalions to keep it in a passable condition. I recall a night when I had a vivid dream of being back in Calgary and walking along quiet streets. I awoke to hear the roar and clatter of the passing traffic, and fell to speculating upon the question of how much longer the war would last, and of when we could all go home again. Once more I could not avoid the feeling that what I had dreamed was purely visionary, and that the signs and sounds of war had always been, and always would be, my normal experience of life.

On March 3, I went with a party to visit the trenches in the Neuville St. Vaast sector which we expected to take over within a short time. During the week I drew the supplies and equipment from the 6th Field Ambulance needed to complete my own establishment. On the night of March 4–5, we had one man killed and three wounded on a working party. On March 6 I medically inspected a draft of 140 reinforcements.⁴ The 7th Battalion relieved us on this date, and the 31st Battalion moved into huts near the sawmill in Bois des Alleux. Our horse lines were not far away.

The battalion was withdrawn from the line on March 8 and taken back to billets in the village of Petit Servins to prepare for the contemplated attack on Vimy Ridge. Here we remained for two weeks. The men were rested, put into the best possible physical condition, and practised in the attack over taped out areas of ground.

During this period out of the line, a few minor incidents occurred that may be worthy of record. On March 9 the 6th Brigade was inspected by Right Honourable Robert Borden, Honourable J. D. Hazen and the Honourable Robert Rogers.⁵ Sir Robert Borden seemed to me to present a care-worn and anxious appearance and expression, and Mr. Hazen much the same. However Mr. Rogers carried himself in the most jaunty and debonair manner possible, and one could never have guessed that he was a member of an administration charged with the responsibility of conducting a desperate war.

Rain fell most of the time we were in billets, but we had a few fine days. As Sunday, March 18, was one of them, Major Piper, Lieutenant Franks and I went for a very pleasant horseback ride in the afternoon. We visited the 5th and 8th Field Ambulances in turn, and then rode on into Aubigny, the rail head of the Canadian Corps. I was rendered momentarily homesick by a sign over a warehouse in Aubigny which read: “Massey-Harris Implements.”⁶ I remember that we bought papers

4 A notation in his **Battalion M.O. War Diary** read: “They show lack of discipline – but physical fitness is fair.”

5 The Honourable Robert Rogers was Federal Minister of Public Works and the Honourable John Douglas Hazen held the portfolios of Minister of Marine and Fisheries and Naval Affairs in Prime Minister Borden’s Conservative cabinet.

6 The Ontario-based Massey-Harris Co. Ltd., founded when the Massey Manufacturing Company merged with A. Harris & Son Co. in 1891, no longer exists as such. Massey-Harris Co. Ltd., Canada’s largest farm implement company, also became the largest company of its kind in the British Empire. Ref. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, s.v. “Massey-Ferguson Limited” (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1988).

in Aubigny to get the latest news. The events of the Russian revolution and those connected with the German retreat from the old Somme front formed the major topics.

On March 21 Captain Dunham and Captain Dunlop of the 5th Field Ambulance called at our mess. That same evening an airplane came down near our village on account of engine trouble, and we put the two officers up for the night.

At one of my sick parades a member of a recent draft presented himself complaining of a weak ankle. His disability was due to the effect of an old badly reduced fracture. He protested that he could not do long marches, and I could readily see that this must be so. In fact he never should have been taken on for active service. I asked him how long he had been in the army, and he told me eleven months. I then put the question to him if he considered it fair for him to spend that length of time training and then leave the unit that he had joined on the eve of an important engagement. He readily accepted my point of view and agreed to carry on. For my part I told him that I expected him to go over the top with his unit in the coming battle, and I promised that if he survived the action I would send him back to the base.

On March 24 the battalion returned to the line and went into the Neuville St. Vaast trenches, relieving the 18th Battalion. During the forenoon I visited Château d'Acq, where Colonel Jacques who had succeeded Colonel Fotheringham as Assistant Director of Medical Services, was now stationed. As the battalion was marching to Mont St. Eloy that morning a Boche plane flew very low overhead, taking careful observations. We had scarcely become settled in the camp before Mont St. Eloy and Bois des Alleux were heavily shelled. A number of casualties resulted, but fortunately for us nobody in our battalion was hit. The shells came crashing into the village as we were having lunch at the headquarters' mess. Jacobs, our mess cook, reported that his mess orderly seemed nervous for some reason that afternoon.

At 3:30 p.m. Lieut.-Col. Bell, Major Piper, Major Hornby, the adjutant; Captain Petty, and I left for the front. We reached Territorial Dump at aux Rietz, a short distance from Neuville St. Vaast, at 5 p.m. A German plane flew overhead at the height of a few hundred feet and we could see the pilot in the cockpit of the machine. There was great air activity on both sides, and we witnessed an inconclusive fight on our side of the line a short distance away and quite close to the ground. Neither plane seemed able to obtain enough advantage of ceiling to achieve victory. At 5:30 p.m. I took over the Regimental Aid Post from Captain

Parker, the acting medical officer of the 18th Battalion. This aid post was a shallow dugout located at a trench junction near the Neuville St. Vaast cemetery, a rather too appropriate position, I thought. We had no casualties the day we took over but the following afternoon I sent out Corporal McKenzie of the 4th Field Ambulance, wounded by shell splinters in the thigh and head.

This was a very severe tour of duty for us. Preparations for the assault on Vimy Ridge were going full steam ahead. Bombardment was practically continuous on both sides for six days. The weather was vile, characterized by hard frosts at night, high winds and squalls of snow and rain during the day with intervening periods of bright sunshine. The trenches were very muddy. It was the same mud that had plagued us since the October before, except when it was frozen.

The area of our Regimental Aid Post seemed a favourite target for the enemy shells. Sometimes they went short and sometimes they went over, but without making a direct hit. As I have said, it was located at a trench junction, and this position may have accounted for the attention we were receiving. The sentry who was posted a few feet from our door, used to call out the fall of the shots to us.

On March 27 I made a tour of the trenches and inspected a new deep dugout that the engineers had just completed for use as an aid post on the day of the battle. It was a fine, big dugout with good head cover and contained racks for twelve stretchers. This dugout was placed at the junction of Bessan and Territorial trenches, the latter being one of our main communication trenches. The site was but a short distance west of the entrance of Zivy Cave and to the south of the cemetery. There appeared to be no good reason for us to delay our move, so we stood not upon the order of our going but went at once. By 6 p.m. we were comfortably installed in our new quarters. When Willis returned to our vacated dugout to recover something that we had left behind in the moving, he found the sentry killed. Fierce shelling continued throughout the afternoon.

When our battalion took over these trenches, a situation existed almost exactly parallel to the one forming the central theme in the famous war play "Journey's End."⁷ In order to assist the higher command in

7 "Journey's End" was written by R. C. Sherriff, a Great War British army officer. Set entirely in the officers' dugout along a British trench, the action centres on the tensions of the platoon commander, Captain Stanhope, during the few days before the anticipated March 21, 1918, German assault on the British lines at St. Quentin. When

planning the coming attack, our divisional intelligence staff wanted some enemy prisoners captured from whom information could be derived concerning the dispositions of the enemy troops. The duty and task of securing this source of necessary information fell to the 31st Battalion. As was usual, I attended the conference when the plans of the operation were discussed, and the strength and personnel of the attacking party decided upon. When I went to see "Journey's End" years later the whole scene and discussion of this conference were brought back to me so vividly that I was unable to sleep for most of the night following.

Opposite the centre of our position, the map of the German trenches showed a section in the form of a small salient projecting towards our line. Colonel Bell determined to block this off with a concentrated artillery barrage and send in a raiding party. Colonels Brittain and Stewart, commanding the artillery brigades supporting us, entered into the arrangements with cooperative zest. The duty was allotted to D Company in command of Major Seaton. The strength of the raiding party was placed at 60, including two officers. Two fine young officers, Lieutenants Appleby and Barnes, were chosen to lead the raid. The date was the 29th and the hour, 7:30 p.m.

We had a heavy day with many casualties, even before the raid. I completed my share of preparations for this. I asked the field ambulance for a squad of bearers and chose two trustworthy first aid men to accompany the raiding party. The ones chosen were Wolfenden and Thorburn. Wolfenden was the man who had brought the mortally wounded Sergeant Barnes out of the line in the battle of Courcellette. Our new Regimental Aid Post was all cleared and ready for action.

At the fatal hour of 7:30 p.m. our artillery went into action and blocked off the selected area of the German position with a wall of bursting shells. Within ten minutes the enemy guns replied in full strength. The vicinity of the aid post was vigorously pounded. We received one direct hit, but the roof withstood the shock perfectly, and the only inconvenience we suffered was the putting out of our lights and the buzzing in

Stanhope receives two orders which doom his officers and men, he copes by drinking. The preliminary trench raid does produce a German prisoner, but only half of the raiding party returns. Worse losses await. His platoon has orders to hold the line at all cost, without support, throughout the March 21 assault. This was the first time a play showed the brutality of the war, and the audience was shocked. When "Journey's End" opened on December 9, 1928, at the Apollo Theatre in London, it became an instant success.

our heads from the concussion. Of course we had no immediate knowledge of the progress of the raid.

By 9 p.m. walking wounded began to arrive. By midnight we had attended three stretcher and nine walking cases. Two German prisoners were reported captured. Lieutenant Appleby and eight men were reported missing. The number of missing men was later reduced, as will be told, but poor Appleby we never saw again.⁸ One A Company man was killed in the counter-bombardment. Both Wolfenden and Thorburn returned unscathed. It was now pouring rain, and throughout the night anxious enquiries came to the aid post pressing for news of Appleby and his missing men. Lieutenant Bob Carter, a D Company officer, called several times in quest of information.

In spite of our severe casualties the division considered this raid a great success, for we were told that the information furnished by the prisoners was of exactly the nature required. Just as in "Journey's End." Two of the missing men reported later. One had had a remarkable experience. When the raiding party withdrew, he was left behind in the German trenches. Here he remained concealed all of the day following. When night came, he climbed through the German trenches between sentry posts and rejoined his unit.

The night after the raid we were relieved by the 28th Battalion and moved back to support trenches at aux Rietz. I turned over the Regimental Aid Post at 9 p.m., and by midnight the relief was complete. As I have stated, this six-day period had been a very trying one for us, and our casualties were almost as heavy as they proved to be in the main show a few days later. Thirty-three casualties passed through our aid post, 29 of whom belonged to the 31st Battalion. Seven were stretcher cases. Twenty-five sick were evacuated, including six cases of mumps from A Company. There were also a number of minor accidents such as barbed wire cuts. Our casualties totalled 53, ten killed, 36 wounded and seven, including Lieutenant Appleby, missing.

8 Lieut. Norman Appleby, MM*, killed in action, March 29, 1917, age 27. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 16. The asterisk indicates that he was entitled to a bar which signified the second Military Medal. While in an enemy trench Lieut. Appleby was instantly killed when the Germans nearby tossed back a Stokes bomb that had been thrown into their dugout by a member of the 31st raiding party. Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 188–89. P B:—Although designed to be fired out of mortars, these shells, which were significantly more powerful than hand grenades, were a favourite of trench raiders who threw them into bunkers with devastating effects on their occupants.

At the aux Rietz support area we were quartered in deep dugouts, and did not have such a bad time – we had no casualties. During the day of April 3, I walked back to Château d'Acq and called on the Assistant Director of Medical Services. The roads were very muddy, and in a field beside the road I counted over 30 dead horses. The short rations, hard winter and abominable road conditions had together taken a heavy toll of our transport animals. A vigorous bombardment went on all afternoon. On my return journey I called at a battery of eight-inch howitzers which was in action. The officer told me that they were firing up to 60 per cent of their barrage volume and planting 30 tons of projectiles every day in the German lines. It is said that more than 4-million shells were fired in the preparation and attack in the battle of Arras.

On the afternoon of April 4 our artillery put up what looked like a full dress rehearsal of the coming show. The Germans must have thought it was the real thing, for their S.O.S. signals went up along their line for miles, and they laid down a heavy counter-barrage behind our front line between Neuville St. Vaast cemetery and Zivy Cave. This latter was instructive for us as it showed where we were likely to run into grief from the enemy artillery in the coming attack.

Our battalion was relieved at 11 p.m., April 4. I went out with the Battalion Headquarters officers by the way of La Targette. Our guns were firing a barrage. The roads were very muddy and crowded with transport and ammunition limbers. We reached the horse lines at 2:30 on the morning of April 5 and were served with a meal and hot tea which helped us materially. After our horses were ready we rode back to a camp of huts a short distance northeast of Quatre Vents.

XXI THE STORMING OF VIMY RIDGE

Make all our trumpets speak; give them all breath,
Those clamorous harbingers of blood and death.

– Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene VI

The date of the great battle of Arras, of which the attack on Vimy Ridge formed an important part, was now set definitely for Easter Monday, April 9. Originally it had been planned to take place on Easter Sunday, but the date had been changed to comply with French tactical requirements. The great attack was to be launched by the 3rd Army under General Allenby and the 1st Army under General Horne.

The Canadian Corps which formed part of the 1st Army was commanded by Lieut.-General Sir Julian Byng. Under his command, the Canadian Corps would attack with all four divisions in line, arrayed from right to left. Thus the 1st Division was on the right flank in touch with the 3rd Army, which was centred on the city of Arras. The 4th Division was on the extreme left of the attacking line. They had the hardest task of all to perform; for not only was their ground the most difficult, but they constituted the refused flank, or lateral limit of the attacking force.

The Canadian Corps really consisted of five divisions, for the 5th British Division was attached by brigades to the Canadian divisions for added good measure and to give additional weight to the assault.¹ I take pains to explain this, because I feel that we Canadians have not been over generous in giving the due and proper share of credit to the men of this fine division from the Old Land for the part they played in achieving the wonderful exploit of capturing Vimy Ridge.

The usual pre-battle rumours were afloat. It was said that General Byng's plan of attack did not call for a prolonged artillery preparation, but that he wished to send over the infantry assault on the heels of a hurricane bombardment of 48 hours and before the enemy had time to

1 The 13th British Brigade was attached to the 2nd Canadian Division.

recover from the effects. Some months later, when General Byng was in command of the 3rd Army, this strategy, in a modified form, proved very successful in the great attack before Cambrai.

Our generals of division were as follows: 1st, Major-General Currie; 2nd, Major-General Burstall; 3rd, Major-General Lipsett; 4th, Major-General Watson. More than a quarter of a million men from the two armies were to take part in the action, and the infantry assault would be supported by the fire of some 3,000 pieces of artillery. I was told that we had one gun for every seven yards of front.

During the winter months the internal organization of the infantry battalions had undergone a radical change.² The so-called specialists – machine gunners, bombers, and rifle grenadiers – instead of being held as separate sections, were incorporated within the platoons. As a result, each of the primary units was now a miniature army in itself, equipped with all the infantry offensive weapons. There were 16 platoons in a battalion, each consisting of between 30 and 40 men. This change in tactical formation certainly added much to the striking force of the infantry. The rifle grenadiers were armed with bombs furnished with rods to fit into the bore of the rifle, and they could be shot a considerable distance with a high trajectory curve. They were very useful in dealing with machine gun nests, and a skilful grenadier could attain surprising accuracy with these strange weapons. The platoon machine gun sections had Lewis guns.³

The artillery had introduced a couple of innovations in the form of improved shells, from which much was expected. One had a new type of fuse which became so sensitive after it left the gun that it detonated the instant its nose touched the ground. It had great destructive effect and was useful in cutting down barbed wire defences. The other shell was more spectacular in its action. It was an incendiary projectile fitted with a time fuse, and as it burst it seemed to rain down a liquid fire of thick creamy consistency upon the target beneath. We indulged in considerable speculation as to the effects expected of this “thermite” shell, as it was called. Many years after the war, Sir Archibald Macdonnell, who commanded the 7th Brigade in the Battle of Arras, told me that he had

2 See William Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914–1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), Chapters 4 and 5. – P B.

3 This was the standard British light machine gun for the remainder of the war. One was allotted to each platoon at the time of the Vimy attack. A second was added later.

asked General Lipsett what effect this new shell would likely have on the enemy.

"I do not know," General Lipsett replied, "exactly what it is supposed to do to him, but I am damned sure it will not do him any good."

The weather continued to box the compass and produce all varieties; rain, snow, hail and sleet, sometimes all in one day, with occasional short bursts of sunshine. The mud was atrocious, although it dried a little during the brief intervals of sunshine. There were hard frosts every night.

For some unknown reason I had a presentiment that I would not survive the action, a feeling that had never afflicted me before any of our previous engagements. I tell this to show how little attention should be paid to these so-called "hunches," for in the battle that followed I did not have even the satisfaction of experiencing a narrow escape. I suppose that most gloomy prognostications of this inexplicable nature are the result of either an overloaded conscience or an overloaded liver.

On the morning of April 6 I attended a lecture at Four Winds on the treatment of gas poisoning, and in the course of the afternoon I inspected the equipment of the stretcher bearers. On the afternoon of the following day I walked down to Château d'Acq to get my operation orders from the Assistant Director of Medical Services and to attend a conference of the 6th Brigade medical officers. My operation orders instructed me to establish my aid post at some point within the "Red Objective."⁴

Shortly after I left camp, on my way down, I passed the door of an estaminet wherein a number of the troops were drinking. A boy, whom from his features and complexion I recognized as being a true aboriginal son of Canada, was standing outside, evidently hesitating to enter. Inside a high and wordy argument was in progress. Whether the colour line or the provisions of the Indian Act were being invoked I do not know. Presently a big chap came to the door, calling back over his shoulder, "Now you fellows might just as well shut up; if he's good enough to help us storm the Ridge on Monday, then, By God!, he's good enough to drink with us today." This champion took the excluded one back into

4 As part of the planned assault on Vimy Ridge, a series of carefully staged objectives were depicted in colour on the assault map. The black and red lines were in the forward zone. Further south there was an intermediate blue. The final objective was the brown line on the steep rear slope of the Ridge.

the tavern where I trust the colour line was washed out in French beer or vin blanc.

This little walk will always be memorable to me. On the way my path crossed high ground from where I had a good view of a wide stretch of our objective two days thence. All around me in the valleys and folds of ground our heavy batteries, mostly 12-inch and 15-inch howitzers, were in full action, Vimy Ridge was boiling like a kettle under the storm of shells. I reflected that Fritz's morale was unlikely to improve under this flogging.

Easter Sunday dawned cold and clear following a hard frost at night. At 7 a.m. the battalion began marching out of the camp by companies. We were to spend the day in the Bois des Alleux, concealed within the forest until nightfall when we would take up our position in the assembly trenches at Neuville St. Vaast. I walked over the fields to the wood, calling at our horse lines on the way, and rejoined the battalion in Bois des Alleux at 9 a.m.

It was a fine drying day, clear and sunny but cold. There was a rookery in the woods, and clusters of nests could be seen high up in the tree tops. Flocks of rooks, evidently resenting our presence as an interference with nest-furnishing operations, kept flying in circles overhead among the trees, and voicing their protests in loud cawing. Aeroplanes droned in their flights back and forth across the wood. Among them I saw for the first time some of our new type of triplane, which had made their appearance on the front a few days before. These aircraft did some good work, but were never wholly satisfactory and were soon withdrawn.

Certain changes had taken place in our officer personnel during the winter. Major Hewgill had been called home to Canada in January because of the accidental death of his father. When he returned to duty he was placed in command of the 21st Reserve Battalion in England. Captain Appleyard had replaced Captain Walker as our padre.

At 2 p.m. our new padre held church parade and nearly all the unit attended. Later, the band played one air after another during the afternoon, among them "My Home in Tennessee" which I think I heard for the first time. I have never heard it since without recalling that Easter Sunday in the Bois des Alleux. And even now, the hearing of a particular popular air of the period will cause me to recall and fix the date and place of a war episode. We crossed the sea with the band playing "The Tulip and Rose." We trained in England to the music of "Keep the Home Fires Burning" and "Who's Your Lady Friend?" Later in Belgium we heard "Pack Up Your Troubles," and we marched to the Somme behind

the wailing notes of the “Long Long Trail.” In 1918, “Oh Oh Oh, It’s a Lovely War” was a favourite, and throughout the whole period we were entertained by the thousand and one variations in the song “Mademoiselle from Armentières.”

At 3 p.m. I gave final instructions to my stretcher bearers. Gillrie of B Company and Thorburn of D were ill and I replaced them by two bearers from the reserve. Three platoons from each company were going into action, leaving one in reserve, but I sent forward the full complement of first aid men.

As I have explained previously, a certain number of officers were always detailed to remain out of a general action. The Colonel often consulted me in this matter because sometimes the physical condition of an officer would be a determining factor in the selection.

During the afternoon Lieutenant Franks came to me with the suggestion that his friend, Captain Powis, should be left out of the attack as he had been working to the maximum and was not in the best of condition. Besides, he had a wife and child. Shortly after, I was called aside by Captain Powis who intimated that if it came to a question between Franks and him as to which should take part in the fight he, Powis, should certainly be selected for the duty. He advanced various reasons in support of his contention. All other ranks were inspired by the same spirit. One man – I forget his name – had been marked Permanent Base because of a double rupture. He also came to me in the afternoon and begged me as a special favour to bind him up securely with bandages so that he might go over the top in the morning, before being sent back to the base. In spite of my unfortunate experience in the case of Sergeant Barnes on the Somme I did as he requested, and applied a double spica bandage to his groin. I am happy to relate that both this man and the one who complained of the weak ankle came through unscathed. As for the two officers, Franks went into the battle and survived it and the war. Powis remained in reserve only to be killed later in the Battle of Passchendaele.⁵

A spirit of quiet confidence pervaded the whole battalion. There were no signs of elation or excitement. The behaviour and demeanour of the men indicated that to them the storming of the hitherto impregnable

5 Major Gordon Douglas Powis, killed in action, November 6, 1917, age 30. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 614. Major Powis was shot through the forehead by a sniper while instructing his men of C Company during an attack on a German pill box. Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 272.

Vimy Ridge was only something of a detail in a day's work and to be taken for granted. I am sure that our Colonel, later Major-General Bell, must have experienced a thrill of pride in the character and conduct of the soldiers he was about to lead into action.

I have since read accounts of this battle wherein the soldiers were described as going forward with set jaws and expressions indicative of intense determination. If any of this sort of thing existed in the 31st Battalion it must have come on after dark, for I saw nothing of it. If you had addressed these men as heroes they would have regarded you with wonderment, and probably would have suspected you of trying to pull their legs, to use the slang phrase. They had no time for any affectation or play acting.

The men had a hot meal at 7:30 p.m., and soon afterwards were moving off to the front. At 9:15 I left the bivouac with Battalion Headquarters staff, accompanied by my orderlies. The roads dried considerably during the day. The battalion was shelled on the way in, but by midnight we had all reached our assembly trenches without any casualties. The night of April 8–9 was partially cloudy and strangely quiet in so far as our artillery was concerned.

We all knew the operation orders for the early morning. Zero hour was set for 5:30 a.m. The 4th and 5th Brigades would attack at this hour and carry the first two lines of enemy trenches up to and including the Arras-Lens road. At zero plus 155 minutes the 6th Brigade would pass through the other two in artillery formation, deploy for attack in front of the Arras-Lens road, and storm the village of Thélus behind the barrage, consolidating upon the Blue objective beyond the village. The 27th Battalion would then pass through the other three battalions of the brigade and exploit success in the direction of Farbus Wood, on the far slopes of the Ridge. This was known as the "leap frog" method of attack. The 31st Battalion was detailed to take that part of Thélus south of the Neuville St. Vaast-Thélus road.

My orderlies and I were to go forward with the attacking battalion, carrying all necessary supplies, including water, 48-hour rations, dressings, instruments, primus stove with a tin of gasoline, or petrol as we called it there, an acetylene gas lamp and a tin of carbide for the lamp. The packing of the latter proved to be carrying coals to Newcastle, for in the captured village we later found several 50 kilo drums of carbide among the German stores. However, we didn't know that when we started.

There was little sleep for anybody that night. At 4:30 we were all afoot trying to restore the circulation in our cramped limbs. A drizzling rain was falling and a southwest wind blowing. As 5:30 approached we all stood on the fire step of the trench, staring into the darkness towards the German line. My own immediate aid post personnel for the coming action were Corporal Bright and Willis, my two regular medical orderlies; Private Given, C.A.M.C., taken forward to supervise the water supply; and E. J. Brown, my personal orderly, who had replaced Ben Jones after the latter's death on the Somme. We had already distributed our medical supplies between my own and the orderlies' packs.

Promptly at 5:30 on April 9, the whole western horizon blazed into a continuous display of lightning, and in a few seconds we heard the crashing thunder of the guns. At the same instant we heard, overhead, the roar of the passing shells, resembling the sound of a terrible wind blowing over the tree-tops but magnified many times. High up we could see innumerable tiny bright points passing swiftly towards the enemy, the time fuses of the shells.

But our chief interest lay towards our front at the German trench where presently our barrage burst into a tempest of fire. The new thermite shells seemed to pour down thick liquid fire like golden syrup from a jug. Almost immediately the enemy's frantic S.O.S. signals went up for miles along his line, and the assault of Vimy Ridge had begun. It was all very spectacular, and Lieutenant Robertson remarked that in order to clear expenses a theatre manager would have to charge \$10.00 a seat to put on a show like it. Those of our unit left out of action and watching from Mont St. Eloy saw all this, but also what we could not – the mines exploding on the Pimple far to the north.

Before long, figures began to appear out of the rain and semi-darkness, coming in our direction, and these we recognized as parties of prisoners being herded to the rear. At 8:05 the Red objective having been reported captured, we climbed over the bags and moved forward through the German barrage. The unit was in artillery formation, i.e. divided into small groups to minimize as far as was possible the effect of the enemy shell fire. This had fallen where we expected it, between the cemetery and Zivy Cave but it had weakened considerably since zero hour owing to the good counter-battery work of our heavy artillery. The mud, usually such a curse, was now somewhat of a protection; for the heavy shells buried deep before detonating, and often the only injury we sustained from a close burst was to be splashed with mud.

Just as we entered the barrage I came across a newly severed human foot lying on top of the mud directly in my path. It was cut off above the ankle as cleanly as though done with an axe. The boot and sock were completely stripped away, and the skin was as white and clean as if the owner had just come out of the bath. It was mute evidence that someone had been blown to pieces but a moment before. As we proceeded I saw a shell burst in the centre of a group to our right, toward Zivy Cave. Two of the party crumpled up and fell; the survivors never missed a step nor even glanced at the fallen. That was the kind of discipline that made the taking of Vimy Ridge possible. One of those hit here was Lieutenant Forbes,⁶ a fine young officer of our unit. Of course we did not know this until after the action.

A couple of stretcher bearers of C Company attending a wounded man attracted my attention next. I called out to them to learn why they had dropped behind, for the orders to the stretcher bearers had been that they must keep in touch with their platoons and not wait to dress the wounded while the attack was in progress. They begged me to allow them to dress this man's wounds and I consented. They rapidly dressed their man, pulled him into the shelter of a trench, and then hurried off to catch up with their company, which they quickly did.

We soon passed through the barrage, over the late German front trench and then on to our jumping off line, the Arras-Lens road. The 4th Brigade had done its work well, and no concealed machine gun nests were left to open up on us from the rear. As we climbed the high ground we had a splendid view of the battle towards our right in the direction of Arras. The rain had ceased and the sun was breaking through the clouds. As far to the south as we could see, our barrage was sweeping like a storm over the Ridge, and the country behind seemed fairly crawling with troops advancing to the attack. A very high west wind, almost a gale, was now blowing, and this, driving the smoke of the bursting shells before it, made our advancing barrage resemble closely a blizzard on a Western Canadian prairie. At 9 a.m. we reached the Red objective with A, the leading company, which at once went into extended order and formed up for the attack on the village. Everybody was in the highest spirits, and as each section came into line, jokes and best wishes for continued good luck were shouted across from one to the other. The

6 Lieut. Donald Brothie Forbes, killed in action, April 19, 1917, age 31. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 247.

attack was evidently going – to use a hackneyed phrase of the time – “exactly according to plan.”

We were well ahead of our schedule, and the battalion had to wait for the barrage to lift before going forward. In the meantime our men crowded as closely as possible to our standing barrage which was tearing the west end of Thélus to pieces. At 9:35 the barrage lifted and the attack swept forward into the village. At this stage we sustained a few casualties from our own artillery. This was not the fault of the gunners. The guns had been firing since 5:30, and on account of the heat generated were overshooting; i.e., their range had lengthened. At this, the beginning of the second stage of the attack, nine fresh batteries that had been masked well forward came into action on our divisional front. They shot quite accurately on the correct line, but for the reason explained some of our men had pressed too far forward and were caught in this new burst of fire.

The time had come for me to select a Regimental Aid Post. We established a temporary one in a wrecked German concrete machine gun emplacement, and walking wounded soon began to arrive. By 11:35 the battalion had reached all its objectives and Battalion Headquarters moved forward. Several stretcher cases and walking wounded had been sent out. One case, evidently mortally wounded, was still on hand. He had a ghastly abdominal injury, and all we could do for the poor chap after we dressed his wound was to give him enough morphine to keep him comfortable. Every time I had a moment to spare I went to see him. When I felt his pulse he would open his eyes and say, “Is it getting any stronger Doctor?”

By this time the sky was clear and bright, with a gale blowing from the west. Back at Château d’Acq we had a captive observation or kite balloon. The wind tore this loose from its moorings, and it drifted directly over our heads far into the enemy territory. Long afterwards I read an article – I think it was in the *Saturday Evening Post* – written by the observer in this balloon and describing his wartime adventure. He had made a safe landing in his parachute, well behind our lines.

The first rush of the wounded was now over and I decided to look for better quarters. We found a deep German dugout, but thinking that it might still contain live Germans that the moppers-up had missed, I had my orderly, Brown, bomb it out. I then explored the interior, carrying my electric torch and cocked revolver. I found it entirely unoccupied and made it our Regimental Aid Post.

At 3 p.m. I received a message from L/Corporal Talbourdet, the senior stretcher bearer of A Company, to the effect that he had found the German dressing station in a fine dugout at the far end of Thélus village. Shortly after the receipt of this message I went forward into the captured village to investigate the reported discovery. A short distance from our jumping-off line and on the western outskirts of the village I came upon Private Davenport of A Company. He was half sitting, half lying, in a shell hole, with his head resting on his arm. My first thought was that he had fallen asleep in this position, which looked quite a comfortable one, and that his company had gone on without him. When I went over to awaken him I found him stone dead with a machine gun bullet through his heart.⁷

Accompanied by one of the orderlies, I went on through the village and found the dressing station all that Talbourdet had reported. After inspection of the dugout, I went on up to C Company's position and saw a couple of wounded that had been reported. One came out on a stretcher and the other walked.

At 5 p.m. I returned to our morning position and cleared a number of wounded on stretchers, using German prisoners as carrying parties. The following note appears in my diary, timed 9 p.m.:

Snowing hard. 20th Battalion ration party taking out a stretcher case. We have now four stretcher cases and two walking wounded in the dugout, two of the former and the two latter being German prisoners. The day has been generally fine with squalls of rain and snow. Pte. Willis and Pte. Given, C.A.M.C., have gone forward to take possession of the R.A.P. in Thélus.⁸

There was a hard frost in the night, and at 6 a.m. on the morning of April 10 the ground was covered with snow. I left Corporal Bright to clear the wounded still on our hands, and with Brown, went forward to the German dressing station in Thélus. Corporal Bright was to follow on and rejoin us when he had disposed of the remaining wounded. I made an early start as I did not wish to run the risk of having the fine dugout taken by someone else. It might have been a near thing, for when Brown and I reached the place we found that Willis and Given had not

7 Pte. Alfred Riley Davenport, killed in action, April 9, 1917, age 41. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 179.

8 War Diary of M.O. 31st (Alberta) Battalion, C.E.F. April 9, 1917, entry 21.00K.

arrived, but they turned up a few minutes afterwards. They had become lost out on the Ridge in the snowstorm and pitch dark the night before, and had been forced to spend the night in an abandoned dugout. Fortunately, the dressing station was still unoccupied except by a poor devil of a wounded German who had been dressed by his own medical officer, apparently just before the latter had made his escape. He had been lying there forsaken for the past 24 hours and seemed genuinely pleased to see us.

We found this dressing station in every way suited to our needs. It contained a good stove and a plentiful supply of fuel; also a full stock of excellent surgical supplies. In addition we found a sack of potatoes and much black bread. The latter did not greatly interest us, but the potatoes were a real luxury as we had not had them in our own rations for many a day. We had been receiving a ration of chestnuts in lieu thereof, and these were very uninspiring indeed.

Thélus had been an important enemy supply dump and I realized for the first time what a tremendously strong appetite the looting instinct is, and how well disciplined troops must be to refrain from falling to plundering at critical junctures in military operations. In Thélus we found military stores of all kinds, rations, clothing, equipment, and a large amount of engineer's material. As noted earlier, amongst the latter we discovered drums of calcium carbide which came in very useful for our acetylene gas lamp. It was necessary for me to exercise self-restraint to refrain from embarking upon an extensive exploration in search of booty among the spoils of war. As it was, I brought away a German officer's greatcoat and a ground sheet. The latter I still have. In the intervening years it has done good service at many a picnic.

East of the village our troops had captured a large and well-stocked wine cellar, containing brandy, a variety of bottled wines and an almost unlimited stock of soda water. The first wave of the attack had taken the brandy, the moppers-up had secured the wine, and by the time the medical officer arrived in the procession, there was nothing left but the soda water.

As I have said, all our natural inclination was in the direction of plundering the German stores, but we had something else to do. Very soon we had our aid post up and going in the new quarters with every advantage in the way of space and supplies. At 8 a.m. I paid a visit to Battalion Headquarters. Two hours later the casualties began to arrive. Several stretcher cases were the result of one shell burst that caught a party of our men at the village well. The enemy kept shelling the village

throughout the day, especially in the vicinity of the well, the position of which he of course knew accurately. Casualties continued to come during the day, but there was never any rush or congestion of wounded. We made use of the German surgical material, which was of first-rate quality. In the afternoon a wounded cavalry charger with an empty saddle came to our aid post. It was rather pathetic to see this horse come and stand waiting outside the entrance to our dugout. We made use of him to carry out a wounded German prisoner.

Captains Kennedy and Parker of the 6th Field Ambulance called with carrying parties and kept our post well cleared. The last stretcher case to be handed over to the field ambulance squad was a Royal Field Artillery officer badly wounded with part of his lower jaw shot away. I saw in orders afterwards that he had been awarded the D.S.O.

At night we were snug and comfortable in our new home. We had a good fire in the stove, and the boys cooked up a big pot of potatoes from the spoils of victory. The dugout was warm and brightly lighted by our gas lamp. We could not have been more comfortable anywhere. I have a hazy recollection of one or two of C Company officers helping us eat the boiled potatoes.

The 4th Battalion relieved us during the night, although at 6 a.m. the relief was still incomplete. At 8:15, April 11, I turned over the aid post to a runner of the 4th Battalion and left with my orderlies to join the 31st Battalion Headquarters in Zivy Cave. We had had only one stretcher case in the night, a 29th Battalion man, and he was still in the aid post when we were relieved. At 9 a.m. I reported at Zivy Cave and in the afternoon took over the aid post at the corner of Territorial and Bessan trenches from Captain Lavelle, M.O. of the 20th Battalion. This was the new dugout we had occupied at the time of our raid the last week in March.

A heavy snowstorm raged all evening, and by midnight there must have been nearly a foot of snow on the level. I remember when I received my mail that night there was a large parcel of provisions in it, sent to me by a cousin in Toronto. I do not think a soldier's parcel was ever more welcome, for it saved the orderlies and me from going hungry until the next morning. Along with the mail, we also received newspapers which we eagerly scanned to discover what had really happened and what we had been doing during the eventful and exciting days of April 9 and 10.

During this action we handled, in our two different aid posts, wounded from all four units of the 6th Brigade, and, besides prisoners of war, casualties from the following other units: 6th Trench Mortar Battery;

Love I must not be used
France, April 13, 1917.

Dear Birdie, -

I have your two letters of Feb 20 and March 10 respectively. And the night before last just after ~~the~~ we came out of the big battle you have read about your parcel arrived. It could not have come at a more opportune time. We were all ~~tired~~ and hungry. My orderlies had had nothing to eat since the night before and I was just trying to rustle them some rations when your box arrived. I hope you will approve of my procedure when I tell you that I took nearly all the delicious eats with which the box was stuffed and added them to rations that the transport brought up for my boys. The cheese I kept for ~~it~~ put in my haversack for our next fight, but the scarotines, ~~chocolate~~ chocolate, wafers & chewing gum I gave over to my orderlies who were in a dugout a couple of hundred yards away. It was snowing hard and the night was as black as a wolf's mouth. It

would have done you good to have heard the remarks the boys made and to have seen their faces when they saw the feed that was brought them. They had been working for 3 days and nights almost without any sleep and with wet feet all the time. I gave the socks to one of the orderlies whose own were soaking wet and who had his boots on his bare feet. You need have no fears that your parcel was not appreciated. The cigarettes I smoked myself and am busy on the box of tobacco. It came in very handy as I had lost my tobacco pouch and contents during the engagement. Thank you ever so much Birdie.

It was a wonderful battle, the best show I have been in. Our men turned the Boche in five days and our losses were not heavy. It was a wonderful sight when our artillery opened the show at 5.30 A.M. The guns all opened at the same moment with a roar like a terrible peal of thunder and for miles all along the German trenches there was

the most wonderful display of fireworks caused by our bursting shells and Fritz's S.O.S signals going up. Our troops advanced as cool and steady as when they had previously braced the attack on ground behind the lines a few weeks ago. For of course we have been preparing for this attack for some time. After we got past the old German front line ~~and~~ we reached some high ground and had a wonderful view of the battle. For miles we could see the artillery barrage sweeping like a blizzard across the German position and the whole country behind seemingly covered with our advancing troops. The sight ~~must~~ must have struck a chill into the German hearts for the sight gave one the impression of irresistible power.

Our weather is of the most atrocious kind. It snows nearly every day and freezes every night. The wind is as bad as anything I have seen.

Give my kind regards to Aunt Stacey.
 Your cousin Harold McGill

4th Canadian Battalion; 6th Field Ambulance; 124th Battery, Royal Field Artillery; 1st Canadian Brigade Machine Gun Company; 6th Canadian Brigade Machine Gun Company; 1st Royal West Kents.⁹ The last-named unit belonged to the 5th British Division which, as I have explained earlier, was attached to the Canadian Corps for this important action.

On April 12 the battalion marched back to Bois des Alleux and went into huts close to our horse lines, and not far from the Corps prisoners' enclosure. There was a hard frost in the night, and as was usual after a battle there was a big sick parade the following morning. Among those present was the man with the old fracture of the ankle. He had performed his part of the contract we had made, and now came promptly to claim the reward. I marked him out for inspection by the Assistant Director of Medical Services with a view to having him returned to the base. I have often wondered what afterpart he played in the war. In any case he did his bit at Vimy Ridge.

At 1 p.m. the battalion received orders to move up to the front north-east of Thélus, preparatory to making an attack with the 6th Brigade on April 16. These operation orders were soon cancelled upon the receipt of the report that the village of Vimy, a station on the Arras-Lens railway line, was already in our possession. It rained hard all that night, but the next morning was bright and clear. The battalion marched off at 10:45 under orders to move up to the Thélus area on the Ridge and engage in road-building.

Major Doughty and I rode up to La Targette. There we left our horses and proceeded on up to the head of the light railway that the engineers were throwing across the Ridge. The enemy was busily shelling the road going down the east slope into the village of Vimy. He was also indulging in the desultory sprinkling of the surrounding area. Major Doughty and I went for a stroll over the higher parts of the Ridge, and obtained a fine view of Lens and the surrounding towns. One of the latter, off to the southeast, was on fire. We had one man killed and six men wounded while on the road work.

9 War Diary of 31st Battalion M.O., 11 April 1917, written at Zivy Cave, listed thirty-five casualties (15 stretcher and 20 walking cases), fourteen of them from the 31st Battalion.

XXII BEYOND THE RIDGE

What, shall they seek the lion in his den,
And fright him there? And make him tremble there?
O, let it not be said! – Forage, and run
To meet displeasure further from the doors,
And grapple with him ere he come so nigh.

– Shakespeare, *King John*, Act V, Scene I

The 2nd Division was holding an outpost line well out in front of the Ridge, and on April 15 the 6th Brigade had orders to relieve in this area. The 31st Battalion was assigned the front line of outposts. Rain fell continuously, the ground was in deplorable condition, and we spent the day in German dugouts of which there was a goodly supply. At 6:30 in the evening I left with my orderlies, in company with the padre, Captain Appleyard, and the machine gun officer, Lieutenant Downie. An hour later we reached our Regimental Aid Post near Vimy station where I took over from the medical officers of the 24th and 26th Battalions. The aid post was in a cellar formerly occupied by a German divisional artillery headquarters and our Battalion Headquarters was in a deep dugout under the railway embankment, about 100 yards away

The cellar provided excellent quarters. Trust the Germans to make themselves comfortable.¹ They had braced the roof thoroughly with heavy timbers, and then had provided the best of head cover by the simple expedient of tumbling the brick building down upon the top of the cellar roof. A kitchen range was in service, and there was a small stove in nearly every room. The rooms were also provided with easy

1 British and Canadian soldiers were always astonished at the quality and permanence of German bunkers and trenches. For most of the war, the German army maintained a defensive posture on the Western Front – they dug in and intended to stay put for some time. The British and Canadians, on the other hand, saw their own trenches and fortifications as temporary, to be held briefly *before* an attack. Hence there was little incentive to improve them. Furthermore, senior British and Canadian commanders subscribed to the view that well-constructed – and more comfortable – entrenchments would undermine their soldiers' "attacking spirit." – P B.

chairs. Of course all these creature comforts had been simply looted from homes in the neighbourhood. The only thing missing was the piano. It struck me at the time that we should be unable to provide so liberally for ourselves until the war was carried into Germany. It is not a matter for wonder that later many of the troops thought the armistice premature.

The sleeping quarters contained a double bank of bunks. I took a lower and the Padre climbed into an upper directly above me. Just as I was about to fall asleep Captain Appleyard called down to me.

"Doctor," he said, "I think I feel something biting me. Do you think there is any chance of these bunks being lousy?"

"Why, Padre," I replied, "do you think there is any possible chance of them not being so?"

Captain Appleyard had a sensitive skin; and this, together with a lively imagination, I fear spoiled his night's rest. As for myself, I was too war-hardened by this time to allow a trifle like lousy quarters to disturb my sleep.

There was heavy shelling in the night. At 8 a.m. I was awakened by voices in the adjoining room which we used as our aid post. I got up to find Bright dressing a forearm wound on a Prussian officer. The other prisoner present was the officer's orderly. He had received a bullet through his round pill-box cap, which he exhibited, still shivering with fear at his close encounter with the "Pale Old Man" in the form of death.

On the other hand, the officer, who belonged to the 5th Prussian Guard, was as cool and unperturbed as if he was making a social call. He spoke fairly good English, and I engaged him in conversation while Bright bandaged his wound. He told me that he had lived in Canada, and had been at Carstairs, Alberta, and in Revelstoke, B.C. I asked him if he ever had gone bear hunting out of Revelstoke.

"Vy," he said, "it ees strange you should ask me zat. Zat is how I my living made." He looked about our quarters with interest, and remarked that he had been quartered there once in the previous winter. "It ees a long time," he added, "since I haf not zeen ze maple leaf."

"Well," I replied, "you are now having a fine chance to renew your acquaintanceship."

He received this verbal thrust without any show of offence, and, throughout the interview conducted himself like a well-bred, affable gentleman. I heard afterwards that he behaved in the same manner before the intelligence officers; and that in spite of several stiff pegs of whisky

expended upon him, he was a blank so far as the intelligence officers were concerned. The orderly was more communicative, but of course possessed less valuable information to impart. We gave them each a cup of hot coffee, and sent them off with their escort, the orderly still showing the two holes in his cap and solemnly shaking his head.

Now, for the explanation of the circumstances that brought us this early morning call from our friends the enemy. We were holding a chain of outposts some distance in front of the railway embankment. In the morning in question Colonel Bell had started out to make a tour of the front, taking Lieutenant Curtis, the scout officer, and Sergeant Sparrow with him. They had not gone far before bullets began to snap around them, and they realized they were being shot at by a German patrol or sniper out in the somewhat ill-defined No Man's Land. They took shelter in a natural hollow to consider the situation.

"With your permission, Sir," Curtis said, "I shall go out and get that fellow."

"All right," replied the Colonel. "Have a try."

Taking advantage of the natural fold of ground, and of what shelter there was, Curtis and his sergeant made a detour forward, and came up behind the two Germans who were in a shallow rifle pit, watching intently for the re-appearance of their prospective target. There was a short sharp miniature engagement. Sparrow shot the cap off the head of the orderly, who threw up his hands. Curtis shot the rifle out of the hands of the officer – it was a splinter from the stock that had wounded his arm – whereupon he also surrendered. Altogether, it was a very smart piece of work. When I told the Colonel that he had had the honour of being fired upon by a professional bear hunter, he remarked, "If he did no better shooting at the bears than he did at me he must have made a rather thin living by his efforts."

The enemy did considerable shelling during the afternoon, bursting shrapnel over the roads and paths. Two of our men were caught by shrapnel. One of them, Sam Geddes, had a compound fracture of the radius. Geddes, a well-known advertising man on the staff of the *Calgary Herald*, finally had his arm amputated, years after the war. In the case of the other, the shrapnel bullet had pierced the muscles of the arm, missing the bone, and was lodged just under the skin near the border of the triceps. With the aid of a local anesthetic I was able to cut down and remove it.

The weather remained cold and disagreeable, with much rain and snow. We were comfortable enough in our cellar, but I felt very sorry for

the troops out holding the line without shelter. Captain Burgess of the 5th Field ambulance called on the April 17. The 29th Battalion relieved us on the following day, and the unit moved back to the Ridge, with headquarters in Thélus Cave. An A Company man was killed before we moved out.

At 7:45 p.m. I turned over the Regimental Aid Post to the M.O. of the 29th Battalion and Captain Appleyard and I, with my orderlies and a guide, started out. By the time we reached the top of the hill the night was very dark with thick clouds, and we lost our way. As is usual in such cases, we had been trying to take a short cut, and had attempted to go direct to the cave on a compass bearing from Vimy station. After wandering about for a time, we brought up in Thélus cemetery. Here we were able to determine our position, and found our way to the cave by 10:15 p.m. without much more difficulty. Enemy shelling was quite lively.

There was a drizzling rain falling the next morning, but the weather was warmer. We were relieved by the 27th Battalion at Thélus Cave, and moved to deep dugouts farther back on the Ridge. At 8 p.m. a 15-cm shell caught a 29th Battalion pack mule train near our new headquarters. They lost one man killed and two severely wounded, and a 31st Battalion man was slightly wounded. We sent the casualties out with a carrying party.

Several men parading sick on April 20 showed signs of fatigue. While at the German dressing station at Thélus I had obtained a supply of small glass ampoules containing a liquid preparation of caffeine for hypodermic injection. I used some of these for the fatigue cases, with apparently good results. The enemy shelled our area vigorously during the night, but fortunately we had no casualties. On April 21 our unit was relieved by the 18th Battalion, and moved back to a tented camp that had been set up near La Targette. I turned the aid post over to Captain Groves, the incoming medical officer.

Spring was at last getting under way. It was indeed very pleasant for us to be out under canvas again after so much burrowing in caves, deep dugouts and cellars. We also enjoyed a certain sense of security in an area where it had been unsafe for us to show our noses above ground two weeks earlier. The only drawback was the presence, just to the west of the camp, of a six-inch long-range gun which shot over our heads. The concussion was so great that one could not lie on the ground in a tent while the gun was in action.

Now that the enemy was “over the hills and far away” I took advantage of the occasion to make a check-up of our casualties during the main action of Vimy Ridge, April 9 and 10. They were as follows:

	Officers	Other Ranks
Killed	1	15
Wounded	3	61
Wounded & Missing	0	3
Missing, believed killed	0	1
Total Casualties	4	80

At the time of my obtaining these figures, April 22, 1917, all of the missing had been accounted for except Corporal Freeman who was still so posted. As earlier noted, Lieutenant Forbes had been killed near Zivy Cave as we passed through the enemy barrage. Lieutenants Barnes, Kennedy and Brown had been wounded. Two of the officers and two of the men were still on duty. One stretcher bearer, Parkhurst, had been wounded. In our tour of duty east of the Ridge we lost six men killed and 24 wounded. Five of the latter were still on duty.

At 4:45 on the morning of April 23 we heard heavy artillery fire from our guns over a wide front. An attack was evidently in progress. At noon I visited the Assistant Director of Medical Services, who was just moving forward into new quarters in aux Rietz. During the forenoon we had three men killed and one wounded on a working party. In the afternoon a man was killed and another wounded by the explosion of a fuse cap of an enemy shell. There were precise orders forbidding the men playing with these articles, but the thirst for souvenirs seemed very hard to counteract. The following morning we had another accident causing casualties in one of the other units in camp where a shell fired by the close-by six-inch gun burst prematurely over the tents. After this the camp was moved back half a mile and placed behind our dangerous neighbour.

On April 25 a few of us, Major Piper among others, decided to pay a visit to Arras, and we started out on foot at 11 a.m. We had a pleasant walk of a few miles. Arras was enjoying a partial delivery. The city had been in our hands, but since early in the war had been practically in the front line. Now that the enemy had been pushed back several miles, Arras presented a scene of animation, with the inhabitants once more

able to walk the streets. It was full of troops and also contained a fair number of civilians. We had lunch in a restaurant, and in the afternoon walked about the town or listened to the music rendered by the different military bands. I remember we especially enjoyed the performances of the fife and drum band of a Sussex battalion, and those of the pipe band of the Cameron Highlanders.

On April 26 the 6th Brigade relieved the 5th Brigade in divisional reserve, and the 31st Battalion took over from the 24th Battalion. Before we left camp, a Boche airplane bombed down one of our observation balloons a short distance away. I established my aid post in a dugout with the other medical officers of the 6th Brigade. I have the impression that we were in the Grange Tunnel.

The weather continued to improve, becoming finer and warmer and, as a partial consequence, airplane activity became conspicuous. On the evening of April 28 there was great activity due to our artillery firing a barrage. May opened with a bright sunny morning and that night our battalion moved into the front line relieving the 24th Battalion in a portion of the line known as the Arleux Loop. In the fighting that had taken place while we were out of the line, our front had been pushed forward a considerable distance, and our old quarters in Vimy village were now too far behind the line for an aid post.

At 8:30 p.m. I started out with my orderlies in company with the Battalion Headquarters staff. We reached our destination at 9:45 to find the quarters very crowded, containing as they did the aid posts of three battalions – ours, the 27th, and the 1st – as well as two Battalion Headquarters. Although the location was also too far in rear of the front line to be suitable for an aid post, there did not seem to be a suitable place farther forward.

On May 2 the enemy guns pounded our battery positions and support areas in front of the Ridge all day long. The Canadian Corps had been conducting a series of attacks during our period out of the line, and another was scheduled to take place at 3:45 on the morning of May 3. The 1st Canadian Division would attack Fresnoy, while the 6th Brigade, with the 27th and 31st Battalions in line, would attack the German line between this town and Acheville to the north. At 11 p.m. Captain Scott, the M.O. of the 1st Battalion, moved forward in search of a new aid post.

On the morning of May 3 the enemy indulged in a heavy bombardment from 1 a.m. onward. It almost looked as though he suspected an attack. At zero hour, 3:45, it was still quite dark. Our guns opened the

barrage, and the enemy came back in full strength within a few minutes. At 8 a.m. Lieutenant Langtry came in wounded, and with the report that the attack had not been a complete success. He reported heavy casualties. Some of the platoons had evidently lost direction in the darkness. An hour later the situation at the front was still obscure, but it seemed certain that the 31st Battalion had failed to attain its full objective. The 1st Division had taken Fresnoy on our right, and the 31st Battalion had one company in the enemy trenches in touch with their left flank.

Heavy shelling continued throughout the day from both sides. A few 31st Battalion walking wounded were coming through, but it was soon apparent to me that our casualties must be passing through other channels, probably through 1st Division lines of evacuation. In the evening, Captain Blair came through wounded, and reported that Lieutenants Barnes, Kingsmith and Eland had been killed.² Lieutenant Newland and several other officers were missing. Late that night the vicinity of our headquarters and aid post was heavily shelled, with the result that we had four men killed and several wounded. During the night of May 3–4 Lieutenant Newland passed through with a wound of the face and several stretcher cases and walking wounded were attended and cleared. The 31st Battalion had been relieved by the 28th in the front line during the night and had retired to the support position.

In the forenoon of May 4 Corporal Talbourdet called with a stretcher party on his way out, and reported that ten more stretcher cases were on their way down from the front. Shortly before 1 p.m. an officer of the 2nd Canadian Field Ambulance reported in person that his bearers had been clearing 2nd Division wounded from the 1st Division aid post at map location T.29.Central; and that there were still some at that point. I sent a message to this effect to Captain Burgess of the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance, who sent up four squads and cleared the post.

At 6:00 in the evening, Captain Scott, medical officer of the 1st Battalion, reported that three 2nd Division stretcher cases were at his Regimental Aid Post and that more were coming. I relayed this message back to Captain Burgess, who arranged to clear these cases and to leave a squad of bearers at my aid post to relay cases on down to his Advanced Dressing Station. He also placed a squad at the new 28th Battalion aid post in

2 Lieut. Wilfred Robert Barnes, MC, killed in action, May 3, 1917, Lieut. Reginald George Walton Eland, killed in action, May 3, 1917. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 36, 222. Lieut. Percival Edward Kingsmith, age 28, was taken prisoner and died of wounds the next day, May 4. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 402.

the Arleux Loop. These dispositions materially improved the situation regarding the evacuation of our remaining wounded. At 11 p.m. Captains Kennedy and Burgess called. The 6th Field Ambulance was relieving the 5th, and would carry on the work of clearing out the wounded.

May 5 began with another bright warm day. During the night of May 4–5 the enemy had put on a bombardment of gas shells, which forced us all to wear gas helmets for a time. We had been busy all night. All four battalions of our brigade were represented among the stretcher cases and walking wounded that passed through, but the majority came from the 28th and 29th Battalions. During the day I visited the Battalion Headquarters back in the railway embankment. At 11 p.m. Captains Ross, Kennedy and Hardisty of the 6th Field Ambulance called. They brought up a motor ambulance car by way of the Willerval-Mericourt Road, named Vancouver Road by our engineers. It ran north from Willerval, which we occupied, to Mericourt in enemy territory, and passed close to Mont Forêt Quarries, where the unit holding the front line had headquarters. It passed a short distance to the east of our present aid post and afforded a route for ambulance cars that was fairly safe after dark.

The next day six stretcher cases and a number of walking cases went through before noon. Two of the former, who belonged to the 31st Battalion, had been lying out in shell holes since the morning of May 3. A motor ambulance picked these up on the Vancouver road. Three more stretcher cases and three additional walking wounded were cleared after dark. Two stretcher cases and one walking wounded were sent out during the night.

At 5:30 on the morning of May 7 the sky was clear overhead with three German kite balloons³ in plain view to the southeast. Soon a heavy ground mist gathered and settled down. Under cover of this, a flight of our airplanes attacked and sent down the three enemy balloons. The airplanes flew over our dugout a few feet above the ground, concealed from the enemy balloon observers by the heavy mist. When they reached the vicinity of the balloons they climbed steeply up to their targets, thus reversing the usual direction of attack, which was from above. To the Germans in the balloons the machines must have appeared like huge flying fish darting up out of the water, for the mist would look like water from above.

3 Tethered balloons used for artillery spotting, i.e. correcting the aim of artillery fire.

The enemy kept shelling the front line, supports and battery positions all day. A few walking casualties passed through. The battalion was under orders to move back to Vimy Ridge with headquarters in Thélus Cave. At 9:30 p.m. Captain McKinnon, medical officer of the 20th Battalion, arrived and took over the aid post. It so happened that Captain Hardisty was present at the time and as his carriage in the form of a motor ambulance awaited him on Vancouver Road, my orderlies and I took advantage of this excellent chance of rapid and easy transportation. We rode in the ambulance as far as Thélus village and at 10:30 arrived at Battalion Headquarters in Thélus Cave. The brigade major there was suspected of being somewhat of a dandy, and to the unbounded joy of all ranks he became thoroughly lousy, like the rest of us.

There was heavy artillery firing during the night, indicating further activity at the front. At 5 p.m. on May 8, the Battalion received orders to move up to the railway embankment in front of the Ridge. However, the order was cancelled before it could be put into effect. This was fortunate, for the men were in no sort of physical condition to undertake further active operations without rest. On May 9, I sent two sick to the 4th Field Ambulance and made a tour of our trenches in the afternoon. The enemy was vigorously shelling portions of the Ridge. Twelve men went sick the next day and I sent five of them to the field ambulance. That evening we were relieved by the 25th Battalion, and moved back to the rest camp behind aux Reitz. I gave over to Captain McIntyre, the medical officer at 8 p.m. This officer was later killed, before Cambrai in October, 1918, during the advance that terminated the war.⁴

The weather held fine and warm for the three days we spent under canvas in the aux Reitz camp. The spell was a wonderful relief, for some of us had begun to fear that we should never be warm and comfortable out of doors again. It was like a taste of paradise to be able to sleep in tents and to have an opportunity of making a change of clothing. We had not had our clothes off our backs for 15 days. The battalion band was in good form; and their performance gave much pleasure to all ranks in our short respite from the squalor and misery of the trenches. We set up our portable gramophone, and ground out the old records for perhaps the hundredth time. May 12 was very hot. In the afternoon Captain Bob

4 The officer was Capt. James Grant MacNeill, not Captain McIntyre. Capt. James Grant MacNeill MC 6th Fld. Ambulance CAMC was killed in action, October 12, 1918, at age 25. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 455.

Pearson put on a concert in the Y.M.C.A. marquee tent. Even the primitive sport of pitching horse-shoes gave us satisfying recreation. I have a note in my diary remarking the beautiful sunset of May 12.

I have mentioned the date, May 12, particularly, for it was the second anniversary of the exact date of our departure from Calgary. Not many of us were left out of the crowd that left on the two troop trains that fine May morning two years before. However, there were a few survivors, and I was fortunate to be among them.

On May 13 I had a sick parade of 31, and admitted six of them to the 4th Field Ambulance. One of them had mumps, a hangover from the curse that had been following us for months. Pending our return to the line I had a chance to check up on our casualties for the preceding action. They were heavy, and as follows:

	Killed	Wounded	Missing
Officers	4	7	0
Other Ranks	41	134	57

The officers killed were Lieutenants Barnes, Morton, Eland and King-smith.⁵ The list of officers wounded included Major Blair, Lieutenant McIvor, Lieutenant Ashburner, Lieutenant Newland, Lieutenant Forbes, Lieutenant Lane and Lieutenant Langtry. Two stretcher bearers were killed, Quinny and McCreedy⁶ of D Company. C Company lost three stretcher bearers, Todd and Gallup wounded, and Redshaw missing.⁷ I saw Todd in the autumn of 1918, just before the close of the war. He had recovered of his wound, and had joined a machine gun battalion on his return to the front. The greater portion of the missing turned up later in various hospitals. These were the men who had been evacuated through 1st Division channels, and the reports of whom were late in reaching battalion records.

5 Lieut. James McLaren Morton, killed in action, May 3, 1917, age 26. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 548. Lieutenants Barnes, Eland and Kingsmith were noted earlier.

6 Pte. George Henry Quinny, killed in action, May 7, 1917; Pte. Howard Charles Pre-toria McCreedy, killed in action, May 7, 1917, age 17. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 622, 486.

7 Pte. John William Redshaw, died of wounds, May 5, 1917, while a prisoner of war. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 629.

It may now be evident that the high hopes with which we opened the season's campaign by the great and successful battle of Arras had not been realized in full, or even in part. We did not know then, as we afterwards did, that the fighting for the month following the capture of Vimy Ridge was in the way of a delaying action. Because the French operations on the Chemin des Dames had turned out badly,⁸ our operations were designed to hold the enemy in front of us, and to give the French army a chance to recover. Whether or not this strategy was successful I do not know; but I do know that the operations were discouraging to our men; they were so costly, so unproductive, and apparently so purposeless.

Of course it is always easy to be wise after the event; but it was well known to all ranks that the enemy had fallen back for miles after the loss of the Ridge. A well-organized attack on a large scale might have cleared the whole of Northern France. As it was, the Germans soon returned in strength; and our forces were robbed of what might have been the abundant fruits of our victory on Easter Monday.⁹ The Germans thoroughly understood the art of war; and took up their new position just far enough east of the Ridge to force us to move our field artillery forward, and down on the low ground in front of the Ridge, where they were able to tear our battery positions to pieces. The Ridge itself, instead of being a source of strength to our front line system, became somewhat of an obstacle to our lines of communication, although it remained an important factor in our reserve defence system.

Shortly after the date of which I write, the major operation involving the capture of the Messines Ridge was of sufficient importance to cause the necessary diversion in the plans of the enemy, besides achieving a real military success. Up to the battle of Amiens on August 8, 1918 – the day named by Ludendorf as the black day in the German annals of

8 This massive and rashly planned assault – the so called “Nivelle Offensive” after its French commander, General Robert Nivelle – resulted in very heavy casualties. Thereafter, cracks began to appear in French morale, cracks which soon led to instances of open “protests” and even mutiny. This situation was only stemmed by long overdue reforms within the French army. – P B.

9 Although it undoubtedly represented a widely held view in the Canadian Corps, it was groundless optimism. The Allies lacked the resources to press on and the Germans were still too strong. The early years of World War I were replete with disasters caused by British and French attacks being pressed too far. The new Anglo-Canadian strategy of the “bite and hold” attack with its more limited and achievable objectives – Vimy Ridge being the brilliantly-executed test case – was a long overdue operational innovation. – P B.

the war – it had almost appeared that our higher command had always striven for a more or less compromise result.¹⁰ The brilliant attack of Byng's 3rd Army towards Cambrai in the autumn of 1917 was a notable exception to this general statement.¹¹

Among German documents captured in the early summer of 1918, when the tide of war was running strongly against the Allies, was one containing a commentary on British strategy and tactics, written by a high German commander. The writer pointed out that on three separate and distinct occasions the British armies were in a position to achieve a tremendous success by exploiting victory; but that on each occasion they had thrown away the chance by halting operations at a critical moment. Two of the examples he cited were the battle of the Somme on September 15, 1916; and the battle of Arras.¹² I forget the other instance mentioned.

Our use of cavalry is an example of what is meant. Up to August 8, 1918, it seemed to me that our deployment of this arm of the service was more in the nature of a conventional compliance with the stereotyped maxims of warfare than an attempt to effect a definite purpose.

For example, after our attack on the Somme, September 15, 1916, we sent in a single squadron of cavalry, which was held up, of course, by the first string of barbed wire protecting a machine gun. The same fate befell a troop that went over the Ridge after the infantry had carried the enemy position on Easter Monday. On the other hand, at the battle of Amiens our higher command went at the thing as if they meant business and hoped to accomplish something. Immediately the German front line gave way, three whole divisions of cavalry were thrown in *en masse*, with the most gratifying results.¹³ The morale effect upon the defeated enemy was in itself tremendous.

10 Field Marshall Douglas Haig's adoption of attritional warfare, though costly in manpower, nonetheless was the only alternative if the German army was to be worn down. Dr. McGill rightly makes clear, however, that such a grand strategy looked rather bleak for the soldiers asked to execute it. – P B.

11 The tank-led breakthrough at Cambrai in November, 1917, overreached itself. German counterattacks inflicted very heavy losses on the British (including the Canadian Cavalry Brigade) and virtually all of the impressive initial gains were lost. – P B.

12 In both cases the Germans were unaware of the losses inflicted on the British attackers. Their rather optimistic (from a British perspective) assessment must be seen in this light. – P B.

13 This is a considerable exaggeration. In fact, the cavalry encountered very serious difficulties at Amiens. – P B.

And now after this little excursion into matters which may be irrelevant, and upon which, in any case, I have no call or right to offer an opinion, I shall return to my ordinary duties to which I am supposed to confine my attention. On the evening of May 13 our unit took up a reserve position on the Ridge in the Paynesley House area in front of Neuville St. Vaast.

The morning of May 17 was cloudy with a northwest wind. There had been heavy rain and artillery fire most of the night. I held sick parade at 9 a.m. and, among the 16 who appeared, I admitted two to the 4th Field Ambulance. Our unit was under orders to relieve the 29th Battalion in the Vimy railway embankment area that evening. I left with the orderlies for Vimy at 7:30 p.m. and an hour later arrived at the aid post and relieved the medical officer. There was very little shelling.

In the evening of May 18, I went with Major Doughty, Lieutenant Metcalfe and Sergeant Bennett to pay a visit to the 26th Battalion Headquarters, located in Mont Forêt Quarries. When we were on our way up the road to the Quarries a low-flying German airplane sprayed the road with machine gun bullets, forcing us to take temporary shelter at the roadside. While at the Quarries I found out that the Regimental Aid Post of the unit holding this front line sector was on Vancouver Road in an old German howitzer emplacement.

On May 19 we received orders to relieve the 26th Battalion in the front line that night, and take over the left sector of the 2nd Division front. When my orderlies and I arrived at the German howitzer emplacement at 9 p.m. the captured German guns had been removed. On the west side of Vancouver road which passed through a deep cutting at this point, the Germans had dug four gun pits into the bank and the aid post was in one corner of a gun pit. It was lightly roofed over, and screened off on two sides by blankets. There was no shelter from shell fire or even from splinters. Close by, on the same side of the road, there was a shallow dugout for sleeping quarters. Of course the entrance faced the wrong way, towards the enemy. On the opposite side of the cutting our engineers had begun construction of a deep timbered dugout, and were already down some distance into the chalk.

For this tour I had with me Corporal Willis, Private Given, C.A.M.C., of the water squad, and my batman, Private Bevis, who had replaced Brown. Corporal Bright had gone out sick, and Willis had been promoted to take his place. It was a fine clear night, and shelling was fairly active from both sides. We took over from the M.O. of the 26th

Battalion, Captain Cruickshank, and at midnight I sent the men to bed in the little dugout but remained up on guard myself.

It was worth my while staying up all night to enjoy the beautiful morning of May 20 for daylight came early at this season. The artillery fire had died down, and an unusual and peaceful stillness seemed to envelop the scene. As day broke I could see to the west the mass of Vimy Ridge, looming up in the growing light. During that warm and windless morning one could detect a sense of fresh, damp fragrance in the air, something rarely remarked in front line areas. The skylarks were busily engaged in welcoming the coming day, as Lieut.-Col. John McCrae had heard them in Flanders before he wrote his famous poem. At times I could distinguish three or four singing at once.

At 4:30 Given relieved me, and I went down the few steps into the shallow dugout for a sleep. However, I was rudely awakened two hours later to find our aid post the centre of an intense enemy bombardment by 15-cm shells. They were bursting short, over, and on both sides of our frail shelter. We realized that the aid post was the target. Willis ran down into the dugout to awaken me, an unnecessary precaution. The engineers had already arrived to work on the dugout across the road and one of them was hit just in front of our entrance. Given ran out of the gun pit to give him help and, as he did so another shell hit the road, killing the wounded man. Given then took refuge with the engineers in the uncompleted sap, which afforded by far the best shelter available. I discussed our situation with Willis. Personally, I felt as if a block of ice occupied my abdominal cavity. Willis and I exchanged views in the terse diction of a music hall skit then popular among the troops, and familiar in the repertoire of the various army entertainment companies.

"What do you think of it, Willis?" I asked. "Shall us?"

"Let's," replied Willis.

Thereupon we hastily caught up our gas masks and personal equipment. We plunged out into the storm, and along with Bevis retreated in a hurried and undignified manner about 50 yards down the road. From there we watched with anxious interest the enemy shells wrecking destruction upon our quarters. The bombardment did not last long, but lacked nothing in violence and accuracy of aim. When we returned we found the blanket walls and the roof of our Regimental Aid Post torn to ribbons, and our sleeping dugout smashed flat by a direct hit. Worst of all, our rations were at the bottom of the smashed-in dugout, and we had a long turn of duty with shovels retrieving them before we could have breakfast. There had been no further casualties, and Given had

been quite safe after he joined the engineers in the uncompleted dugout, which was far enough advanced to have withstood a direct hit.

The morning was taken up in reconstructing our aid post and in digging out our rations and belongings. I had no further opportunity to commune with nature in her loveliest mood, such as I had enjoyed in the early dawn. The day came out quite hot with a light wind east by northeast. There was great airplane activity, and the enemy artillery was generally active. However, we were not disturbed at the aid post after receiving our early-morning dose of hate. Later in the day the wind switched into the southwest. Artillery fire remained brisk all day, but we had no casualties reported.

I remained up and on duty during the night of May 20–21. At 2 a.m. I sent out a couple of sick to the 6th Field Ambulance, and at 4:00 enjoyed another concert from the skylarks. The night was fine and warm, but the sky began to cloud over at 7 a.m. Balloons and airplanes were much in evidence at this hour. The artillery kept busy all day and at 2 p.m. we were again shelled, but no damage was done. We all took shelter in the pioneer sap. At 10 p.m. the artillery fire to the right was very active. At midnight two slightly wounded reported from the line and were sent on to the 6th Field Ambulance. By this time it was raining heavily.

In the early morning of May 22 I paid a visit to Battalion Headquarters in Mont Forêt Quarries. I left the aid post at 2:30 and returned at 4 a.m., having brought back a sick man whom I sent on to the field ambulance. That night we were relieved by the 28th Battalion, and we moved back to our old quarters in the tunnel where we had our aid post when we came into the area for the action early in the month. It was but a short distance west of Vancouver Road, and we were able to walk the distance, carrying our equipment, in a few minutes. We took over at 9 p.m. on a very dark night. At midnight the enemy shelled our dugout quite briskly, and wounded two men at the entrance. Corporal Garrison of B Company, 31st Battalion, had been killed during the day.¹⁴

At 6 a.m., May 23, the morning was still and warm with a partly cloudy sky, and a light southwest wind. The enemy had been throwing

14 L/Cpl Harry Garrison, MM, killed in action, Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 266. According to one account, Garrison was awarded the M.M. for his actions during the battle of the Somme. Previous to that, at the Battle of St. Eloi, he had fought on alone for three days after all of the men on his company had become casualties. "Alberta's Fighting Unit, 31st Battalion, Home After Four Years of Strenuous Warfare," *Morning Albertan*, 2 June 1919, 4.

over gas shells. We had a fairly busy night and evacuated two sick and three wounded, two of the latter being stretcher cases. One of them was a prisoner of war with a compound fracture of the humerus.

This German prisoner introduced a little variation into the usual depressing routine of our work. He had been sent out to carry a bucket of hot coffee to an outpost. Unfortunately for him he missed his own outpost in the darkness, and stumbled across a 28th Battalion sentry, who captured him after shattering his arm with a rifle shot. The prisoner was a tall gangling youth with a fine face and pleasant expression. He was only 18 years of age, although he had been in the army for more than a year. He was pretty well done in after his walk down the line, along with his wound and loss of blood. His captors had used him well enough, but ordinarily a wounded man with a shattered arm is not required to walk.

We dressed the wound and placed his arm in splints. Just as I was finishing the splinting, the boy fainted. After he regained consciousness we gave him a dose of morphine and a hot drink. Soon he became more comfortable, and began to talk in perfectly correct but in a stilted and bookish sort of English.

"I thank you very much," he said, "for your kindness to me."

"Why?" I replied, "Do you not know that it is not the practice of British soldiers to maltreat wounded and helpless prisoners?"

He replied that he had not supposed so, but had understood that the Canadian troops were an exception. When I asked him where and how he had acquired this idea, he said that his unit had just been moved into the area. Upon their arrival they had been addressed by their colonel who warned them that they were facing Canadian troops who were cruel and brutal beyond measure, and that a horrible fate awaited any prisoners that were unfortunate enough to fall into their hands. The English, the colonel added, were not so bad, but the Canadians were barbarians.

No wonder the poor kid was relieved and grateful upon receiving humane treatment. He had been a student in the University of Munich when he was drafted into the army. It was there that he acquired his pedantic English. I said that as a German university student he should have duelling scars on his face; where were they? It was a little time before he was able to grasp my meaning. As he did so, he gave a wan smile and pointed to the bandaged arm. He asked me if I was acquainted with Philadelphia, but did not explain the purpose of his question. I told him that I had been there, but could not lay claim to much knowledge

of the place.¹⁵ We sent him on a stretcher to the 6th Field Ambulance Advanced Dressing Station at Willerval. He thus passed from under our hands and out of the war. If he still lives in Munich he may sometimes think of, and remember, his pleasant surprise at being well treated by Canadians.

May 24 was not a holiday for the Canadians in France in the year of our Lord, 1917. I revisited the old Regimental Aid Post on Vancouver Road where we had so nearly met disaster and between 2 and 5 p.m. I called on the 6th Field Ambulance Advanced Dressing Station in Willerval. Throughout the next day the enemy kept pounding our battery positions. Casualties and damage to guns were severe for, as I have explained, our field guns had been brought over the hill and moved down in front of the Ridge into a position devoid of any possibility of concealment, exposing them to constant hammering.

The next day proved quiet and uneventful. Our orders were to give over to the 21st Battalion that night and to move back to the rest camp at aux Reitz. At 10 p.m. I was relieved by Captain R. J. Manion, the medical officer of the 21st Battalion and at midnight reached camp. The enemy was shelling the road, but the unit suffered no casualties. The total 31st Battalion casualties for our last tour in the line amounted to two killed and six wounded. During the forenoon of May 27, the Germans dropped a few shells from a long-ranged gun in and about our camp. These did no damage, but the demonstration showed that they had spotted our camp, and that further attention might be expected.

May 28 was also fine and warm with a continuing southeast wind. At 9:30 a.m. we broke camp and moved it back to a new site. While camp moving was in progress I walked back to St. Eloy, which was now well into the back country. I remember I passed an airdrome on my way. It was a beautiful morning and in the course of my walk across the fields I put up a covey of grouse of the same variety that was known as the Hungarian partridge in Alberta, and which had been an importation from Europe originally.

The battalion was inspected by the commanding officer of the 6th Infantry Brigade at 3 p.m. on May 30. The last day of May was an important date in our history, for the unit was being withdrawn from the line for a rest. We had orders to move to our rest billets in to the

15 Harold McGill had taken post-graduate medical studies in Philadelphia around 1909.

village of Houdain, two day's march to the northwest. It was necessary for us to cut down our impedimenta to regulation weight. Jacobs, our headquarters mess cook, had been using a nice little cook stove that he had salvaged from a ruined house, and which he did not wish to discard permanently. Thinking that we might return to this same part of the front, and not being able to take the stove along, he took the precaution to bury it carefully and to mark the place with a sign reading: "Resting Place of a Canadian hero."

XXIII SUMMER HOLIDAYS

From brightening fields of ether fair-disclosed,
Child of the sun, refulgent Summer comes
In pride of youth, and felt through nature's depth.
He comes, attended by the sultry hours
And ever-fanning breezes on his way,
While from his ardent look the turning Spring
Averts her blushful face, and earth and skies
All-smiling to his hot dominion leaves.

– James Thomson, *The Seasons*

My records for the month of June are not extensive, but the recollections I possess are among the happiest of those relating to the days of active campaigning. In truth, June, 1917, was the most enjoyable month of my whole experience with the battalion in the war zone. We were having the best time since we landed in France. There were no enemy shells or airplane bombs to plague us, and for a time we could almost forget the dangers of war. I have a note in my diary, dated 11:45 p.m., June 8, that there was a heavy bombardment in the direction of Lens. I think that this is the only entry for the month that had any reference to the sound of artillery fire, or to any other sign of active military operations. The weather was delightful; rather hot, but very pleasant after the months of cold and wet we had endured during the preceding winter and spring. The rain came chiefly in the form of thunderstorms, and sufficiently often to keep the air clean and fresh.

The battalion was billeted in the charming little town of Houdain, which is prettily situated in a delightful countryside just out of the coal-mining region of Northern France. It was a country of hills and valleys, with streams and stretches of fine woods. We had good billets, and all ranks were able to enjoy for a short period some of the ordinary comforts, if not the luxuries, of life. The civilian population was very friendly towards us, and the boys of the battalion got along splendidly with the inhabitants of the town.

The unit was undergoing a course of refresher training while out at rest; but no forced pace was set, and the men were encouraged to go in for sports and recreation. To complete the picture, there was even a village swimming hole three kilometres south of town. The water was very deep and made an admirable swimming basin. It was in an old abandoned stone quarry which had been allowed to fill with water, and formed a pool some 500 feet long and about half as wide. There must have been an underground ingress and egress for the water, for it was always clear and fresh. On the afternoon of June 7, I rode out with a small party to the swimming pool and, as the weather was hot, the swim was most gratifying. That evening I attended a concert in the Hôtel de Ville given by the 4th Divisional concert party who rendered very good entertainment.

Under these circumstances we took our routine duties lightly and enjoyed life in the army while we had the opportunity. My own duties kept me busy but not overworked. I usually held sick parade at 6:30 a.m., except on Sundays, when it was an hour later. The warm summer mornings were, almost without an exception, bright and beautiful. A gentle southwest wind blew nearly every day. Early rising under such circumstances was an enjoyable experience. After sick parade I would have breakfast and then begin the day by inspecting all of the billets and the battalion quarters in the forenoon, starting at 10:30. Later in the day I would deliver lectures and instructions to the stretcher bearers, sanitary police and to the different companies on first aid, army sanitation and kindred topics.

A few days after our unit settled down into our new quarters the question of our holding a battalion sports day came up, and it was given favourable consideration. A committee was formed to discuss ways and means. We first considered getting out an invitation list and sending invitations to the maire and the chief burgesses, and their wives to attend the performance. At this stage of our preparations we sought the counsel of Gage, the French interpreter attached to the battalion. Gage was a good interpreter, and a man of common sense who thoroughly understood his own people. When our plans were explained to Gage he at once advised against it:

"I know this will sound foolish to you," he said, "when I tell you that this little rural town is a cross-section of the social, religious and political structure of France. There are here, representatives of practically all the various political parties and religious sects. Don't you see what will

happen if you issue a select list of invitations? Why, it will tear the town into two rival camps, and cause heart-burnings that will affect generations yet unborn. My advice to you would be to prepare a general invitation to all inhabitants of the town and post it on the door of the Hôtel de Ville."

We took Gage's advice, and had him prepare the notice of invitation which he did very well. The notice simply extended the compliments of the officer commanding and the officers and men of the 31st Battalion to the maire and worthy citizens of Houdain, and asked the favour and pleasure of their presence on the field where the battalion sports were to be held June 12, 1917.

There was a heavy thunderstorm on the night of June 10-11, and the rain continued to fall nearly all of the following day. We began to get anxious concerning our field day of sports, but the weather cleared up in the evening.

June 12 was bright and fine with a light northeast wind. The sports day meeting was a great success, and the large audience of civilians justified the line of action advised by Gage. The children attended in crowds as a school holiday had been declared for the occasion. We had special foot races for the boys and girls, and every one of them seemed to enter for an event of some description. The maire and the village doctor were on the grounds. The latter could speak English, and introduced me to Monsieur le Maire as "mon confrère." The doctor was much interested to learn that I had been in Vimy, as he knew the medical practitioner who had been there. In the crowd of spectators there were several French soldiers in uniform, home in their native village on leave, who were taking part in the holiday with their families. A few of our men from the transport section, including Paddy O'Brien, dressed up as clowns and performed to the wonderment and delight of the children. The program ended in the evening with a concert given by the concert party of another unit. I have a faint recollection that this troupe came from the 5th Battalion, but I am not certain. Anyway, they put on a good show. The civilians, especially the children, went home happy and satisfied. This sports day in Houdain is among the few pleasant reminiscences I have of the days of war.

The battalion spent the whole of June 14 at musketry. On June 16 the whole unit attended the 6th Brigade sports meet, which was held at a village a few miles northeast of Houdain, up in the colliery country. I forget the name of the town, but I think it was Ruitz, a coal-mining

town between Bruay and Barlin.¹ I rode to and from the scene of the meet on horseback, for the day was hot for marching. We were gone from 8:30 in the morning until 8:00 in the evening. Our unit won a number of events, including first and second in the mule race.

The next day, a party of us took our horses and rode out to the swimming pool for a dip. On the way we stopped to watch a couple of peasant girls making lace. The day was so hot that they were sitting outside in the shade of the house. It was interesting to watch with what ease and dexterity they manipulated their numerous spools of thread between the pegs of the weaving boards. We also saw children out picking wild strawberries, and the sight gave me an exquisite twinge of homesickness. It made me think of strawberry shortcake, and of how long it had been since I had had the pleasure of eating or even seeing a piece of this dainty confection. This article of diet was not issued in the army rations during the Great War.

On June 18 I medically inspected a reinforcement draft of 325 men who had been sent to bring up our strength after the heavy losses of the two previous months. Most of these reinforcements came from the 202nd Battalion,² and were exceptionally fine material by all standards, as to physical condition, intelligence and discipline. Four days later I gave a T.A.B. inoculation to 242 men, as a protection against typhoid and A and B paratyphoid fevers. I presume that these men were from the recent draft, but have no record that such was the case.

During our month in Houdain we held a battalion mess night for the second time since coming to France. All of the officers of the unit dined together, and we had as our guests the officers of the 6th Brigade Headquarters. I had the honour of presiding, and called upon Lieutenant Scaddan, who acted as vice-president, to propose the King's health in proper military fashion. Poor Scaddan was afterwards killed at Passchendaele.³

1 The Brigade Sports Meet was held at Haillicourt. Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 225.

2 The 202nd Battalion had been raised in Edmonton district in 1916.

3 Lieut. Charles Manfield Scaddan, died of wounds, November 7, 1917, age 38. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 668. Scaddan was seriously wounded while rendering first aid to his senior N.C.O. The two German prisoners ordered to carry Scaddan out on a stretcher abandoned him under severe shelling. He was found the next day but died from wounds and long exposure. Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 269.

It is said that happy nations have no history. In the same sense there is not much for me to record in the way of war happenings during the balance of this, our happy month of June. The chief war news of the month was the storming and capture of the Messines Ridge. This was of particular interest to us because it was in this area that we had undergone our baptism of fire.⁴ We wished that we might have been able to stand on Kemmel Hill and watch the 19 mines explode at the opening of the attack, for the saps for these mines were being run when we held the trenches on the Kemmel front nearly two years before. Occurrences of considerable interest to the Canadian Corps had taken place in the month of June. Sir Julian Byng had succeeded General Allenby in command of the 3rd Army upon the departure of the latter for Egypt and the Turkish war. General Currie, commander of the 1st Division, had received command of the Canadian Corps.

The end of the month approached. I had put in an application for leave, and hoped to get away before the unit received moving orders. The battalion was under orders for inspection by the commanding officer of the 2nd Division on June 29. We knew that Col. Webber, the G.S.O.1, would expect a first class turnout from a unit that had had a month to rest and refit, and the necessary steps were taken to put on a good show. On June 28 I made a thorough inspection of my stretcher bearers and all their equipment. I did not appear on inspection parade, after all, for the warrant came for me to start my leave on June 29.

Captain Neilson of the 5th Field Ambulance relieved me on the evening of June 28, and I proceeded on leave the following morning. The leave train was to depart Aubigny some time around noon. I left Houdain on horseback at 9 a.m., and took a groom with me to return with the two horses. It was a beautiful morning and I enjoyed the ride to the railhead. I remember that on the way I passed Major-General Archibald

4 Harold McGill to Emma Griffis, 17 June 1717. In his letter to Emma, McGill stressed the importance of the capture of the Ridge: "We were all greatly interested in the big fight at Messines & Wytchaete for we were up in that country for nearly a year. I know the geography of the Ypres salient better than I know the country around Calgary. It did not matter in what part of the salient one happened to be, he had only to look around to see the Wytchaete hill. The hill dominated the whole salient, and Fritz could see us from the time we left our billets to move towards the front. It would have been good business to have spent 50,000 casualties to take that ridge at any time during the war, i.e., provided it could have been held as it is now. The capture of the ridge will certainly make a big difference in our toll of casualties."

Macdonell who had taken the place of General Currie as commander of the 1st Division.

I had a bit of a wait in Aubigny, but the train finally got under way. Captain O'Sullivan of the Dental Corps, who formerly practised dentistry in Calgary, was on the train. We enjoyed the ride to Boulogne where I went to the old Louvre Hotel and awaited the departure of the leave boat in the morning. In due course I reached Folkestone and finally London on June 30. The Cecil Hotel had been taken over as a military headquarters of some sort, and I went to the Goring, a fine little hotel near Victoria station.

The next day was the jubilee anniversary of Confederation of the Canadian Provinces, and there were various celebrations and ceremonies in progress among the Canadian residents of London. I did not take part in any of these affairs, but got in touch with my cousin, Lieutenant Sydney McGill, who was on his way to the front, and who afterwards became the scout officer of the 29th Battalion. We had lunch together at the Goring the following day, Sunday. Here we met General Turner who told us about the fine celebration of Dominion Day in which he had taken part. After lunch Syd and I went out to Richmond. It was a fine hot day and large summer crowds were present. He and I managed to engage a good Canadian canoe, and paddled down the Thames to Eel Pie Island and back again. Altogether we had a pleasant afternoon's outing.

At this time the Admiralty made provision for a certain number of army officers on leave to visit the Grand Fleet where they remained as guests of the Royal Navy for a week. When I began my leave I had an idea of taking advantage of the privilege and spending part of my leave visiting the fleet at Scapa Flow. With this objective in mind I had called at the Admiralty Office on the afternoon of Saturday, July 1. After running the gauntlet of a series of minor officials I finally was admitted to see the officer who had charge of arrangements. This officer held the rank of commander, and he gave me a friendly and cordial reception. He at once came to the business at hand.

"How much leave have you?" he asked.

I replied, "ten days."

"Well," he replied, "this trip will take practically all of it, but if you wish to go, I can send you out on a train that leaves here tomorrow night for Thurso in the north of Scotland. There you will meet the boat that will take you out to the Grand Fleet in Scapa Flow. By the way, have you obtained the permission of the War Office to make this journey?"

"Why no," I answered. "I didn't know that that was necessary."

"Oh yes," he said. "You must have that, but it is a mere formality, and I dare say that you can get it at once by stepping over to the War Office."

"But this is Saturday afternoon," I reminded him. "will there be anyone on duty in the War Office?"

"I presume so," the naval officer replied. "I don't know why the devil they shouldn't work on Saturday afternoons like other people."

I went directly to the War Office, a short distance away, and obtained my permission without any difficulty. However, in the end I did not make any use of it, for I wished to spend at least a few days in England. I had a number of friends to look up, and my sister, Margaret, who was on her way from France, intended spending her leave in London.

Major Hornby, our adjutant, was in town, spending a month's special leave at the Savoy Hotel. I looked him up there on Monday, and also met Captain MacPherson, formerly of the 31st Battalion. Another acquaintance I met was Joe Convery, formerly of the 12th Mounted Rifles, and with whom I used to go horseback riding out of Calgary in the spring of 1915. Joe had exchanged his mount for an airplane, and now belonged to the Flying Corps. Lieut.-General Smuts of South Africa was also at the Savoy then, but we did not have the privilege of his company.

After a few days in London I went down to Liphook for a visit to Bramshott Camp where I was the guest of Lieut.-Col. Hewgill, the commanding officer of the 21st Reserve Battalion. While in camp I met Lieut.-Col. W. C. Armstrong of Calgary, who commanded another reserve unit, and of course many former officers of the 31st Battalion who had been attached to the 21st Reserve Battalion prior to their return to the front. Most of these were convalescent from wounds received in action. I should explain that the 21st Reserve Battalion was the base unit that furnished our reinforcements⁵ and Bramshott was one of the big base depots of the Canadian forces in England. It was situated in pretty surroundings in the county of Hants, quite close to the London-Portsmouth road.

I went down to Bramshott on Wednesday, July 5. In the afternoon I went up to the hospital with Col. Hewgill to see Miss Griffis, a nursing sister from Calgary. In the evening the Colonel and I called at the house

5 The 21st Reserve Battalion was also the training and reinforcement regiment established in England for the four Alberta battalions serving at the Front: the 10th, 31st, 49th, and 50th. — P B.



CALGARY NURSING SISTER EMMA GRIFFIS OUTSIDE THE CALGARY GENERAL HOSPITAL.
GLENBOW ARCHIVES, NA-4938-10

of Colonel and Mrs. Armstrong and spent a portion of the evening as their guests. Colonel Hewgill and I were supposed to attend a dance at Bramshott Hospital's nursing sisters' mess that night, and I am sorry to say that we were somewhat late in our arrival.

The following morning I paid another visit to the hospital and returned to London in the afternoon. Miss Griffis was on convalescent leave after a sprain of the ankle. She was to have a medical board review again on July 7, and expressed her intention of coming up to London on the Saturday, July 8, if her leave was extended. Upon my return to London I met my sister, Margaret, and Miss Lynch, who were on leave from No. 2 Canadian General Hospital at Le Tréport in France.

There was a severe air raid in London on the morning of Saturday, July 8. A number of bombs fell in the city, doing considerable damage. Among the places hit was Swan and Edgar's store. I slept late that morning and the raid was all over before I left my hotel. During the forenoon I went down to Waterloo station to meet Miss Griffis' train and learned that it was delayed by the air raid, and its hour of arrival was uncertain. I finally went to the Regent Palace Hotel, where Miss Griffis intended to stay, and awaited her arrival there. In the meantime I met Captain Manion, formerly medical officer of the 21st Battalion. He was then on his way home to Canada where he launched his eminently brilliant political career the following autumn.⁶

Considerably after mid-day Miss Griffis reached the hotel, accompanied by another nursing sister, Miss Craig. Lunch hour was now nearly over, and I suggested to the nursing sisters that we go to the Royal Automobile Club, where I was an honorary member "for the duration." Miss Griffis demurred at this, and remarked that she had had no lunch. "All right," I said, "we shall go to the Automobile Club." Again Miss Griffis complained that she felt hungry and in need of her lunch, and again I mentioned the Automobile Club. We started off, and in a few minutes entered the beautiful dining room of the club. It was not until then that the dark cloud of anxiety lifted from Miss Griffis' countenance, and she realized that I had been inviting her to luncheon, and not to witness an automobile show.

The following evening, Sunday, my sister, Miss Lynch, Miss Griffis and I had dinner together at the Savoy Hotel. The dining room was crowded; and two orchestras were performing, one was playing jazz and the other good music. We tried to encourage the latter with a little applause. As was usual in wartime, the majority of the male members of the gathering were dressed in service uniforms. Quite a number of ladies present also wore military attire, including three of our party.

For the next two days we enjoyed our leave together. We attended a number of shows, among them "The Maid of the Mountain" at Daly's, in which we heard Josie Collins sing, and "General Post" at the Haymarket. As a matter of fact I think we saw these two on the same day. "Chou Chin Chow" was having a tremendous run in London at this time and one could hear its tuneful music being played in all the

6 Captain Robert James Manion's duty as a medical officer ended on June 5 when he was admitted to hospital due to an inguinal hernia caused by an earlier fall from a horse.

restaurants. We did not place it on our list as some of the girls had seen it, and there was no lack of good performances to attend in other theatres. Dear old London was at its best, and beautiful summer weather prevailed throughout the time of our wonderful holiday.⁷

My period of leave expired officially on Monday, July 10, and I should have crossed the Straits of Dover back to France on the leave boat of that date. On this occasion I helped myself to an extra day, for the Colonel had told me that he would not treat the crime as a serious one if I were a day late in returning. As Miss Lynch and Margaret were returning on July 11, I waited to cross on the same boat. We left London in the morning and crossed to Boulogne in the afternoon where we put up at the Louvre Hotel for the night. The following morning I had to arise early to catch my leave train, which started at 6 a.m. The girls were good enough to get out of bed to see me off on the train. Here we parted company, they remaining to take a train later in the day for Le Tréport where their hospital was located.

The train I boarded made extraordinary time for a leave train, and brought me to Béthune by 11 a.m. My good luck continued, for directly after lunch I got a ride in a staff car down to the 31st Battalion horse lines. The return journey from London to my unit took just over 24 hours as against the four days I spent on the road when returning from my leave the previous October.

During my absence the battalion had moved into the Lens sector, and I rejoined headquarters at the little mining village of Maroc, near Bully Grenay, at 8:00 in the evening, which was fine and warm. Here I relieved Captain Neilson of the 5th Field Ambulance who left to rejoin his own unit. As we were to relieve the 18th Battalion in the front line after nightfall I left at 9:30 with the members of headquarters staff, and by 11 p.m. I had taken over the Regimental Aid Post from the medical officer of the 18th Battalion in Lievin.

7 At the end of his leave, Harold McGill became secretly engaged to Emma Griffis, five days after meeting her at Bramshott.

France July 12/17.
11²⁰ P.M.

My dear Emma, -

I have just arrived at the aid post of the battalion which is in the front line. The aid post is in the cellar of a chateau that has been wrecked by shell fire.

We had a lovely crossing and arrived in Boulogne about 2 P.M. My train left early the next morning and the girls were good enough to get up before daylight to see me off. Their train was to go some hours later. I did not want them to get up so early but was pleased nevertheless that they did so. At the railhead I was lucky enough to run across a divisional ^{motor} car which landed me right at our horse lines. Later on I came up into

the line and reported for duty.
You will see that I did not
lose much time in getting into
harness again.

My leave seemed almost ~~too~~
good to be true especially when
you told me you liked me and
gave me the promise I so longed
to receive. I was prepared to
have that taxi drive around London
until the petrol gave out or I knew
my fate. But do not think dear girl
that I do not realize what a
terrible responsibility I took when
I asked you for that promise
and the trust in me that it involves.
The knowledge that you love me
is very sweet and before long
I hope we may be able to begin
our lives afresh together. In the
meantime we must both "Carry on".
I think though that quite soon
our immediate relatives and those
near to us should know of our

engagement. However I shall leave
the decision in this entirely to you,
I did not tell my sister Margaret
but shall ^{by letter} do so when we have
come to a decision as to our
general course of action. If any
misshap should be my lot here I
should like my brother & sisters to
know that I had left behind one
who is very dear to me. Can you
tell me what size of a ring you
will wear for me? I wish to send
you one as soon as possible.

When I next get leave I shall ask
for a month and we can be quietly
married and spend it together. The
change you have brought into my life
has caused me to give up the idea of
trying for leave to Canada in the
autumn. Goodbye for present and
please excuse this short letter.

Yours lovingly,
Harold Winskill

XXIV THE LENS SECTOR

O guns, fall silent till the dead men hear
Above their heads the legions pressing on
(These fought their fight in time of bitter fear
And died not knowing how the day had gone.)

O flashing muzzles, pause, and let them see
The coming dawn that streaks the sky afar:
Then let your mighty chorus witness be
To them, and Caesar, that we still make war.

– Lieut.-Col. John McCrae, *The Anxious Dead*

When the Germans lost Vimy Ridge the previous April their position in Lievin became untenable, and they withdrew their lines into the western outskirts of the city of Lens. The 2nd Canadian Division now occupied an area forward and to the left of the position we had held the previous winter, and in what had then been well within the enemy lines. A push of a few miles to the east of Vimy Ridge after our victory of Easter Monday would have freed the manufacturing city of Lens, with all its contiguous colliery towns. As it was, the struggle for the city degenerated into street and village fighting, entailing the certain destruction of the fine city, no matter who finally was able to occupy the site. The immediate result in July, 1917, was weeks of bitter, close in-fighting with heavy casualties, and without any striking compensating result in the way of military advantage.¹ These reflections are of course born of later days and events.

1 The attack on nearby Hill 70, which included the assault on Lens, proved a considerable success for the Canadian Corps, inflicting very disproportionate losses on the German defenders. Dr. McGill's assessment is understandable but incorrect in this instance. Similarly, although from the crest of Vimy Ridge on April 9 it must have seemed to Canadian soldiers that they had the German army on the run, and that a pursuit toward Lens would have been a straightforward and relatively bloodless affair, this was anything but true. Such a push would have quickly taken them beyond the range of their own artillery support and into the teeth of fresh German defences,

At the moment my job was to take over from the outgoing unit and carry on. Eight casualties passed through in the night of July 12, four of them on stretchers, and all but one from our own unit. When morning came I was able to obtain first-hand knowledge of our surroundings. We were in the east end of Lievin, and the town was practically continuous with Lens. Our Regimental Aid Post was in a cellar, but the homes we occupied were those of the well-to-do citizens of the rich Lens area, and many contained pianos and fine furniture. We could remember the winter before when, as we shivered in the mud and wet of the Souchez trenches, we had looked across the German lines over Angres and Lievin towards Lens and envied the enemy his desirable billeting area. Well, now we were in the Promised Land, but the advantages were less than they appeared in anticipation.

During the night of July 13–14 we were relieved by the 28th Battalion and moved into dugouts and billets in and about the village of Angres, which lay just to the east of what had been the site of the German front line trenches the winter before. At 2 a.m. I left the aid post with Corporal Willis, and two hours later opened another aid post in Angres. The night was fine, and the relief was executed with a loss of one wounded, who was able to walk out. For most of the following day the wind set into the southwest, and rain poured down.

The weather cleared on July 16, and at 6:30 in the morning the enemy began a heavy shelling of the vicinity of the headquarters, which he kept up throughout the day. The only loss we suffered was one man slightly wounded. We were under orders for relief by the 21st Battalion, and to move back to billets in the vicinity of Bouvigny, a village situated on the low ground north of the high ridge of Notre Dame de Lorette. By 4:30 a.m., July 17, the relief was complete, and along with the Colonel and other members of his headquarters staff I left for the walk overland to Bouvigny. Our course crossed the double rows of trenches that had been our battle lines the winter before. It gave one an odd thrill to walk upright over what had been No Man's Land earlier in the year, and to step across the already crumbling trenches that had been our home and defence only a few months since. A two hours walk brought us to

and would have assured that the Vimy victory ended with a costly reverse. The essence of the new "bite and hold" attack doctrine employed at Vimy Ridge and Lens/Hill 70 was to inflict at least as heavy losses on the German defenders as on the Canadian attackers by staging a limited and controlled assault built around massive artillery firepower. – P B.

Bouvigny, and a walk of two hours on a bright July morning in France is a pleasant experience, the memory of which sticks. We had good enough billets, and spent several days here enjoying the fine summer weather.

At 6:30 p.m., July 19, Major Powis and I dined with the 6th Field Ambulance mess at Aix Noulette. The officers had a piano in their mess quarters, one of those rescued from the destruction of Lievin and now tuned and put into good condition. Lieut.-Col. Murphy and his officers proved ideal hosts, and a very pleasant musical evening followed a splendid dinner. I remember that Major Cameron, the dental officer, contributed to the song program. Among other songs, all joined with gusto into the rendering of *Alouette*. One of the guests, who had lately been quartermaster of the unit, had transferred to one of the kilted battalions as a lieutenant. I remember that he was called upon to accept considerable chaffing from his former mess-mates as to the possibilities of his future career as a wearer of kilts. He lost his life in the battle of Amiens just over a year later. A sad and depressing feature of war reminiscences is just this: that one can recall so very few of these pleasant social gatherings without remembering how many of the participants did not live to see the day of peace return.

The Germans must have intended returning to Lievin, for they did not wantonly smash and destroy the furniture as they did during the last hundred days of the war, when they were being rapidly driven out of northern France. During that stage of the war, I can recall being billeted in a town which we entered close upon the heels of the flying enemy. In one street I counted five player pianos that had been thrown into the road and smashed to pieces. After the Armistice, when I was with the 5th Field Ambulance in the army of occupation, we were billeted in a sumptuously furnished schloss beyond the Rhine.² I remarked to Captain Moses one day that it seemed to me too bad for us to be walking over the beautifully polished floors in hob-nailed boots. "Well," said Moses, "it will not leave the floors in any worse shape than were those pianos we saw in the streets back in France."

I must confess that this point of view enabled me to repress my concern in connection with the danger of marking up the floors with boot nails. Another pleasantry of the enemy in the days of his defeat and harried retreat was to run a knife all around the margin of a box bed spring, and so render it useless.

2 The old castle, complete with moat and drawbridge, had been rebuilt and modernized with electric lights and steam heat by its owner, a wealthy German munitions maker.

Now I must return to my narrative. On July 22 we returned to the line, and for the next month we were engaged in almost continuous action. By this time we had the city of Lens partially invested to the west, north and south, and were pushing our front forward on both the north and south sides of the city. The result was the stubbornly contested in-fighting referred to earlier, for the enemy could not afford to give more ground without his position becoming wholly untenable.

The city of Lens is surrounded with colliery villages and mine workings, known locally as fosses and designated by numbers; Fosse 10, Fosse 11, and so on. Each was marked by towers and buildings for the hoisting and mining machinery, and by huge heaps of slag and waste coal. The villages were attractive in appearance, and consisted of comfortable brick cottages, each set in a good sized and pretty garden devoted largely to the growth of berries and tree fruit. When the battalion had occupied this front while I was on leave, the strawberries were ripe and contributed to the luxuries of the mess. Now the strawberry season was over, but we were able to utilize the raspberries, currants, gooseberries, etc. The trees were loaded with apples and pears, but these were still green. I could not avoid drawing a comparison between the pleasant living quarters of these French villages with the vile, disorderly and sordid shack towns we tolerate in the coal mining districts of Western Canada.

We moved into this area on July 22 and, except for a respite of a few days, were never out of our uniforms until we were withdrawn a month later, on August 22. The brigade was in close formation in respect to depth, so the shifts from front line to support and to reserve did not entail long moves. We spent most of the time in the mining village of Cité St. Pierre where many of the houses had been destroyed by shell fire. When the battalion was in the front line we had our headquarters in the east end of the village, and moved back along the cobble-stoned streets to the west end when in support. The men were billeted in cellars and dugouts when out of the line. Shelling was almost continuous and thunderstorms were frequent. Our daily activities went on in an atmosphere of shell smoke, poison gas and brick dust.

The brigade was holding what was known as the St. Laurent sector to the north and west of Lens. The night we went in, we took over the support line from the 22nd Battalion in the west end of Cité St. Pierre. At 11:30 p.m. I took over the aid post from the M.O. of the 22nd Battalion. It was a small sand-bagged cellar with a door leading from the trench. As a protection against gas, the doorway was closed by a chemi-

cally treated blanket, making it what was termed gas-proof. Although we were in the support line it seemed to me to be quite lively enough for the front trenches. The shelling was heavy, and during the night we passed through ten casualties, chiefly from the out-going units. Two of the wounded went out on stretchers.

One of the walking wounded was a French Canadian from the 22nd Battalion³ who had been wounded by a shell, quite close to the aid post. When he came in out of the darkness he presented a rectangular piece of shell casing of perhaps a couple of cubic inches embedded in his forehead, and projecting like a steel horn. It had penetrated the outer table of the skull and into the space between the two layers of bone, described by anatomists as the frontal sinus. I took hold of the fragment with a pair of heavy bull dog forceps and attempted to extract it. I might as well have tried to remove a railway spike from a sleeper, and had to desist. I asked the boy, "Am I hurting you much?"

"Oh," he replied, "I 'ave one head-ache."

The soldier walked out with the steel still in his forehead. I presume that it was removed at the casualty clearing station by chiselling, with the patient under a general anesthetic.

Our guns were fairly active all of the next day, but we had no casualties, and were able to get a little sleep. It was well for us that we did, for we had another busy night. We attended seven stretcher cases and two walking wounded. One of the latter belonged to the 31st Battalion. Five of the stretcher cases were from a party of engineers that had been caught by a shell close to our dugout.

We were under orders to relieve the 28th Battalion in the front line after dark on July 25, but this relief did not mean much of a move for the medical personnel for we simply went less than a mile to the other end of the village and took over the aid post from Captain Coy, the medical officer. During our time in support we sent out 24 wounded, two of whom were from the 31st Battalion. Ten different units were represented among the others.

The first night in our front line position was a busy one. At 2:45 on the morning of July 26 a special engineer gas unit treated the enemy

3 The 22nd Battalion (Canadien français) was the lone French-speaking infantry battalion among the fifty that served in the Canadian Corps. After 1919, this unit became part of the regular army as the 22nd and subsequently Royal 22nd Regiment, adopting the nickname "Vingt-deuxième" (or "Vandoos") in honour of the First World War unit. — P B.

opposite to a tremendous dose of poison gas. I heard at the time how many tons of gas cylinders were projected into the German line. This gas company had a very clever and effective way of delivering their deadly chemical. The front line was strung with a row of mortars, each loaded with a gas cylinder and a small bursting charge of explosive. The mortars were all connected up abreast with an electric wire so that the entire battery could be fired simultaneously. The whole discharge was thrown en masse well back into the German lines, and without an instant's warning.⁴

At 2:45 a huge flash and roar came from our front line, and in a few seconds we could hear the popping of the gas drums in the German rear lines. Leading up to this our 18-pounders had been engaged in a desultory spraying of the enemy line with shells. Upon the discharge of the gas the whole area burst into furious activity; there was a constant rattle of machine guns, and the German Very lights⁵ went up in streams. Soon the machine gun fire died down; the flares became fewer and fewer; and by the feeble light we could see a thick cloud of gas, like a fog covering the enemy positions. Soon the last lights flickered out, the gun fire ceased, and a deathly stillness enveloped the scene.

Later in the war I read a translation of a general order issued by the German staff warning their troops against this method of gas warfare adopted by the English, and which they described as very clever and very deadly. The feature of this document that impressed me was its calm, dispassionate tone. There was nothing emotional or in the nature of the hymn of hate about it. It expressed nothing but the warmest admiration for the ingenuity of the English in devising such a scheme. The document went on to explain that this method combined the advantages of both drift and shell gas and proceeded to set out how the ill effects might be minimized by strict discipline and prompt action and detailed measures that might be taken towards this end.⁶

We had a lively time in the aid post as an aftermath of the gas attack. One of the special engineer units was among the 13 wounded. He

4 These were Livens projectors, the standard method employed by the British at this time to fire gas at the enemy's forward trench defences. – P B.

5 These would be calls from the hard-pressed German defenders for artillery support to disrupt what they believed to be an impending attack. – P B.

6 The Allies had a far less developed chemical industry than Germany, with the result that gas warfare, until 1917, consisted primarily of the latter using gas against the former. When the British began using gas in sizable quantities, German gas protection

walked into the Regimental Aid Post with one hand torn off at the wrist. The poor chap, a little Cockney, had been so unfortunate as to have his hand over the muzzle of one of the mortars when the battery was fired. When we removed the dressing, preparatory to putting on fresh ones, he held up the stump and regarded it fixedly without a change of facial expression. Finally he merely exclaimed "Gor Blimey." The words seemed to come from the bottom of his heart, and never have I heard elsewhere such poignancy of feeling as expressed by this common and homely Cockney expletive.

Our heavy batteries hammered the enemy unmercifully during the day following. Evidently he was well occupied in removing his casualties from our gas attack for his reply was feeble. In fact, our forward observing artillery officers could see them doing this. One of these officers told me he was careful not to direct the fire of his batteries upon parties engaged in this work of mercy. And yet, the night before we had exulted in the destruction we had wrought. Warfare is anything but consistent.

On July 27 we sent out one severely wounded stretcher case and one walking wounded during the day. The enemy maintained a heavy artillery fire throughout the night. In the aid post we attended two severe stretchers cases, one of them from the 31st Battalion, and three walking wounded, two of whom also belonged to our unit.

The other stretcher case was desperately wounded, both lower limbs, including the thighs up to the body, being crushed to a pulp. The man was pulseless and, as a consequence, bleeding had practically ceased. Yet, strange to relate, the stricken man was not suffering pain, and his mental state was perfectly clear and active. He was thinking of his mother back in Canada. He asked us to take his name and regimental number and to write to his mother. One of the orderlies wrote down the particulars. The man's name was Blachford but I forget his unit. "You know," he said, "it will be nice for the poor old lady to hear that I'm all right. If she hears that I'm wounded and receives no exact information she will be worrying a lot."

The poor fellow seemed to have no realization that he was through with all earthly affairs. We applied fresh dressings to his mangled limbs

measures were found wanting – they simply had not prepared very well to be on the receiving end of this terrifying weapon. While McGill exaggerates the novelty of the British method of delivering poison gas here, the debilitating impact of gas on the German army in the latter stages of the war was very real. – P B.

and sent him on, and I believe he died before he reached the field ambulance advanced dressing station.⁷

At 7 a.m. the following morning our artillery fired a feint barrage. The enemy came back in full volume and kept up a heavy bombardment all day. We sent out three stretcher cases and one walking wounded, all from the 31st Battalion. The bombardment, much of it consisting of gas shells, continued throughout the following night, directed chiefly on our support areas and machine gun positions. Our front line was scourged with trench mortar gas bombs. During the night we handled three stretchers and six walking wounded.

The night was black dark. A small party of three or four, going to the front line along the road past our aid post, came into the cellar from the outside darkness. A shell had exploded quite close to them. One of them said to me, "Will you please take a look at one of my eyes, Sir? I don't think that I have been hit, but one of my eyes feels as though that shell had blown a piece of brick dust into it. I should like to have you take it out before I go up to the front line."

I examined the eye complained of, and was horrified to find it ripped completely open and destroyed beyond all hope of saving. We sent him back to the dressing station. He was through with the war.

A fairly brisk enemy bombardment, but not nearly so heavy as that of the preceding afternoon, lasted throughout the day of July 29. However, the gas was having its effect, and during the hours of daylight we passed through seven gassed cases on stretchers, six of whom belonged to our own unit.⁸

7 Pte. Ernest Sidney Blachford, Canadian Light Horse, died of wounds, July 29, 1917, age 31. Wigney, *The C.E.F. Roll of Honour*, 61.

8 Canadian gas procedures were excellent – if a soldier could get his small-box respirator properly attached immediately he sensed the presence of gas he would usually be all right. However, the respirators were uncomfortable to wear and gave a feeling of suffocation if the soldier exerted himself; the lenses fogged over and made it difficult to see, and it was impossible to speak while wearing them. Officers and NCOs often briefly removed their masks to shout orders in the din of battle, breathing in the gas in the process. Of course the seriously wounded, unable to put on their gas masks, were extremely vulnerable to gas poisoning. The Germans often combined tear or nausea-inducing gases with the poison variety in order to incapacitate gas mask-equipped soldiers by forcing them to remove their SBRs. Finally mustard gas, which combined with perspiration to produce painful blistering, could attack any exposed part of the soldier's body, not just the lungs. See Tim Cook, *No Place to Run: The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare in the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999) – P B.

The night of July 29–30 was fairly quiet. At 2:40 in the morning the sky was cloudy and a gentle west wind was blowing, a good gas night from our point of view. Gas was discharged into the enemy lines by the division on our right and the enemy opposite us retaliated with trench mortars. The 28th Battalion relieved us that night, and we moved back to the support lines. At 9 p.m. Captain Coy took over the aid post, and we went back to the one at the west end of the village. The orderlies brought our supplies down the street on a wheeled stretcher. In the morning we sent out two slightly wounded from the 31st for doses of anti-tetanus serum.

Our artillery had a busy afternoon on the last day of the month. An enemy plane flew very low over our lines, and his artillery paid a lot of attention to our back areas. We had passed a number of walking wounded through our aid post in the night. The next day we attended one stretcher and five walking wounded, two of the latter being from our own unit. The night of August 1–2 was a blessed blank in our Regimental Aid Post for we saw neither sick nor wounded. The day passed uneventfully until 6 p.m. when we were heavily shelled. Two Battalion Headquarters runners were killed and four men wounded. All of the latter were able to walk out. At night our unit replaced the 28th Battalion in the front line, and by 9 p.m. we had relieved their medical personnel in the forward aid post. Rain continued to pour steadily during the relief.

During the hours of darkness on August 3 we had passed through three stretcher cases and one walking wounded, two of the former being from the 31st Battalion. We sent out three more stretcher cases in the day. The seemingly everlasting rain kept coming down all night and was still falling at 6 a.m., August 4. We had had another night without wounded, but made up for it during the forenoon, when we treated eight stretcher cases and one walking casualty, Major Banks of the Royal Garrison Artillery. This time, the majority of the wounded belonged to the Royal Field Artillery and to the Royal Garrison Artillery or “Heavies,” as they were sometimes called. Although the constant rain was becoming monotonous, it had one good effect: it washed the air clear of the accursed poison gas.

We were relieved by the 19th Battalion on the night of August 4, and Captain Allison, the M.O. of that unit took over the aid post at 11 p.m. The 31st was being removed from the line and marched back to Fosse 10, several miles to the rear. One half hour later, I left Cité St. Pierre with

Lieutenant Leslie Irwin to walk back to our billeting area. The rain had ceased, and it was a clear moonlight night.

We had good billets in a neat little town where we had an opportunity to have a bath and a change of clothing. We spent the first day out of line in getting ourselves cleaned up and indulging in intensive loafing. Except for our trench boots none of us had had his clothes off during the 13 days we were in the line. Over this same period our unit sustained 60 casualties, ten of whom had been killed outright. Another had since died of wounds. Altogether we had attended 108 wounded in our aid posts, 44 of whom belonged to the 31st Battalion.⁹

On August 6 we resumed more regular army hours. I held my sick parade at 7:30 a.m. and inspected billets between 10 a.m. and noon. At the end of that period I paid a call on the Assistant Director of Medical Services. Later, he and I went to the mess of the 4th Field Ambulance, which also had its headquarters in the village, and there we had lunch.

In the course of my talk with the aforementioned officer he suggested that I transfer to the 5th Field Ambulance, one of the three mobile medical units of the 2nd Division. He did not give me any direct order to that effect, but asked me to consider the matter. It was quite plain to me, though, that he wished me to accept the transfer. I had then been serving with the infantry for nearly three years, and was well up on the seniority list of captains in the medical service of the Canadian Corps.¹⁰

On August 8 I made a visit to the Brigade Headquarters in the town of Bully, remained for lunch and discussed the matter of my proposed transfer with Colonel Bell who was in command of the 6th Brigade during the temporary absence of the brigade commander. He advised me to make the change. "It is quite apparent," he said, "that your superior officer means well by you, and desires to make the transfer in your

9 The sick admission rate of the 31st Battalion was very high, 52 sick being admitted. The majority were P.U.O. (pyrexia of unknown origin) and some ran high temperatures. 31st Battalion M.O. War Diary, August 6, 1917 entry.

10 That same day Harold McGill wrote to Emma, now his fiancé, seeking her advice. "The A.D.M.S. wants me to transfer to a field ambulance and offers to make me a senior captain in it so that I would be first in line for promotion. He says that I have done my share of front line work and the D.A.D.M.S. says that if I keep going up often enough I'll get myself killed. Of course, I'm not in favour of that at all, I mean getting killed. Of course a field ambulance position is not bomb proof by any means but it is much less hazardous and less strenuous than that of an infantry battalion M.O. Do you think I had better make the change? I shall not decide until I hear from you."

own interest, as well as in that of the service. It is probably just a preliminary step towards your promotion, and if you turn it down you must not expect to have repeated offers made to you."

The Colonel was good enough to add that he would be very sorry to lose me from his unit. Certainly it was quite a wrench for me to be called upon to sever my close connection with the 3rd Battalion to which I had been attached in more than one sense ever since we mobilized in Calgary shortly after the outbreak of war. Throughout the whole of this period my relations with the commanding officer had been of the most pleasant and satisfactory nature. Besides, I had many warm friends among all ranks of the battalion; officers, N.C.O.s and men. This was especially the case with my medical personnel, none of whom had ever failed me in carrying out the duties I assigned him, and of whom so many had given their lives as a pledge of their devotion to duty.

Shortly after this, probably the following day, I called on the Assistant Director of Medical Services at 11 a.m. to inform him that I was agreeable to go wherever he wished to send me. At 5 p.m. the battalion received orders to move into the support lines of the St. Laurent sector. It was raining at that hour, but when I left for the trenches with headquarters staff at 9 p.m., the evening had become fine. I took over the support line aid post in Cité St. Pierre at 10:30 p.m.

The morning of August 10 was fine and the line seemed quieter than when we had quitted it a few days before. No wounded had appeared during the night and artillery activity was moderate during the day. In the evening the light was extremely good, and our heavies put on a lively shoot. Major Birt, in command of a siege battery, was wounded in the thigh with a shell fragment, and was sent out through our aid post. I remember he had dinner with us in Battalion Headquarters mess before he went out, and entertained us with a detailed account of the famous Baralong incident, the particulars of which he had received first hand from a brother officer who had been in nominal command of the mule skimmers involved in the affair.

The Baralong incident caused considerable interest and world-wide newspaper publicity at the time of its occurrence. It happened at the time of the German submarine campaign, and evoked indignant protest from that capable, if somewhat inconsistent, people.

The dramatis persona, in the way of the ships concerned, consisted of three vessels – the *Baralong*, a disguised, converted cruiser, the *Nicosian*, a mule ship and U27, a German submarine. The mule ship was

headed for a British port from New Orleans, loaded with a cargo of mules intended for military purposes. She was halted in the Channel by a German submarine, which came to the surface alongside and sent on board an armed party for the purpose of placing bombs to sink the ship. In the meantime the submarine stood close by on the surface. The German party on board acted after their kind and subjected the members of the crew and the mule skimmers to the most scurvy treatment, generally conducting themselves in a provocative and abominable manner.

While these proceedings were in progress the *Baralong*, disguised as a merchantman and flying the American flag, approached from the far side of the mule ship. Whether the Germans observed her approach or whether, as is more probable, they were so engrossed with the business in hand that they were taken unawares will never be known. At any rate, while the German boarding party was carrying affairs with a high hand on board the mule ship, to the rage and mortification of the crew and others, the *Baralong* sailed around her stern, and immediately realizing the situation pulled down the American flag, hoisted the white ensign, and destroyed the submarine with a single broadside.

A few of the submarine crew escaped from the tower and swam towards the mule ship. But on board that vessel the situation had undergone a complete transformation. The maddened members of the crew, and the muleteers turned on their captors and overcame them. Some of them obtained rifles and relentlessly picked off the wretched members of the submarine crew who were swimming in the water.

A number of the boarding party escaped down into the stokehold and in their terror took refuge in the screw tunnel. But the pursuit of the infuriated crew was merciless. The engine room staff rigged a hose and turned live steam into the tunnel. Armed with slice bars, the stokers placed themselves at the entrance and dispatched the scalded wretches as they emerged.¹¹

This is the story told us by the wounded Royal Garrison Artillery officer as he had received it from his friend, a retired officer of field rank

11 Although early British accounts denied that an atrocity had occurred, the incident was witnessed by neutral American mule-handlers from the *Nicosian*. Later reports revealed that the surviving Kapitänleutnant Bernhard Wegener and crew of the German submarine U-27, were shot on orders from the *Baralong*'s Lieutenant Commander Godfrey Herbert. Rare references to Germans being killed by live steam surfaced later.

who was in command of the men in charge of the shipment of mules. When this unfortunate officer reached port he was promptly placed under arrest for not maintaining proper discipline.

The evening was fine and still after we had finished dinner and the artillery major had taken his departure for the field ambulance. However, at 10 p.m. the scene changed, and the enemy put down a furious bombardment of high explosive and mustard gas shells around our headquarters and aid post. Major Doughty, in command of the battalion at the time, and five other ranks were wounded. All of us were affected, more or less, by the gas, the effects of which were symptoms of a cold in the head, choking and burning pain in the nose and throat. Besides the members of our own unit I sent out a 28th Battalion man slightly wounded. At midnight the enemy was still sending over a few shells.

We were relieved by elements of the 4th Brigade on August 13. Instead of going into the front line we moved back to the reserve area where we went into trenches and dugouts that had been our front line system of defence the previous winter, and which had been held by one of the other brigades of our division. At 10 p.m. I sent the orderlies out with our supplies to the new area. At midnight I turned the aid post over to a squad of bearers of the 4th Field Ambulance, and walked back to our new quarters in old trenches. The division was preparing for a general action, which explains why the bearer squads of the field ambulance were taking up forward positions. We had fairly comfortable trench quarters in what seemed comparatively peaceful surroundings after what we had experienced since coming into the Lens sector. It was somewhat of a relief to be out of the village in more or less open country.

Orders were issued for a general action on August 15. The 1st and 2nd Divisions would carry out an attack on the Loos and St. Laurent sectors and zero hour was set for 4:25 a.m. The 6th Infantry Brigade, including the 31st Battalion, would be held in reserve, our unit to remain in the trenches we now occupied. That evening the adjutant, Major Hornby, left for England and his office was taken over by Captain Petty. At 10 p.m. the enemy was carrying out a vigorous gas bombardment of Fosse 11 and other back areas. The bombardment continued under a clear sky. A couple of shells dropped close to Battalion Headquarters and forced us to wear our gas masks for a time.

At 4 a.m., August 15, the battalion "stood to," all ranks wearing their gas masks in the alert position. Day was beginning to break. At zero hour, 4:25 a.m., our barrage opened with the usual uproar and pyrotechnic

display, and the enemy S.O.S. signals shot into the sky in the thousands. Our attack was being launched. At 8 a.m. reports from our Brigade Headquarters indicated that practically all objectives of both divisions had been reached. Although nominally our brigade was in action, we were in reserve and took no part in the attack. Between 10 and 12 a.m. I inspected our lines which were as quiet and peaceful as if we were in England. At noon Brigade reported that the 2nd Division held all of its final objectives. Walking wounded and prisoners of war were streaming down the road on their way to the rear.¹² At 5 p.m. our guns were firing heavily, chiefly on the 1st Division front to the left. At 8 p.m. Captain Petty and I paid a visit to Brigade Headquarters in search of news. Our artillery was still busy.

August 16 began with a fine bright morning and a southwest wind. The artillery had seemed fairly quiet during the night, but perhaps that was only in contrast to the conditions that had prevailed during the preceding day. In the afternoon our artillery fire became heavy, reaching barrage intensity at times. Artillery fire became very lively at times during the night, and the enemy drenched our rear areas with gas shells.

On the evening of August 17 the vicinity of our Battalion Headquarters was pounded with 10.5-cm shells. One man was wounded and sent out to the 4th Field Ambulance. The night of August 17–18 was a particularly lively one, and we “stood to” most of the night although we were not called into action. The enemy launched heavy and repeated counter-attacks against the lines captured from him on August 15 and now garrisoned by the 4th and 5th Brigades. Four separate times our S.O.S. flares went up, and our artillery responded on each occasion in full barrage volume. As a record of the night I shall quote from my diary notes made at the time.

12 Harold McGill to Emma Griffis, 19 August 1917. McGill commented upon the POWs: “There have been a good few German prisoners taken here and nearly all of them are hungry. They will pick pieces of bread and biscuits off of the ground and eat it up in a ravenous manner. They say they have had no potatoes for some time. I saw one chap being brought in yesterday with a piece of bread one of our boys had given him still tightly clutched in his hand. He was making sure of having his rations with him no matter what happened. Our boys are splendid. Before they go ‘Over the wall’ they all swear by all that’s high and holy that they will kill every sausage eater they come across. Yet a few hours afterwards you may see them handing out their rations and cigarettes to the prisoners.”

11 p.m., August 17. Enemy heavily bombarding our front. Our S.O.S. goes up and our guns answer with a tremendous barrage. 12 midnight. Our barrage dying down.

1:50 a.m., August 18. Hun begins another bombardment, and all our artillery, heavy and field, is replying to another S.O.S. 2:20 a.m. Bombardment dying down.

3:15 a.m. Our First and Second divisional artillery firing for another S.O.S.

4:25 a.m. Our field and heavy artillery again putting on a terrific bombardment.

The stout boys of the 4th and 5th Brigade withstood and repulsed these furious counter-attacks without flinching. At the time, and later, a good story was told of a battalion commander of the 4th Brigade. It was said that he had reported to his Brigade Headquarters that the enemy was "in temporary occupation" of a certain section of his line. Then, without waiting for further orders or reinforcements, he proceeded to bomb the enemy out, and re-established his position. Altogether it was an exciting night, even for us of the 6th Brigade who were only on-lookers.

The 6th Brigade received orders to relieve the 4th in the front line on the night of August 18, the 31st Battalion going into brigade reserve. At 8:30 p.m. I went forward with the orderlies and took over the Regimental Aid Post in the east end of Cité St. Pierre. The evening was very quiet with high visibility and the relief was complete at midnight. In the night we passed three casualties through our post, two from the 25th Battalion and one from the 27th. On August 20 the vicinity of our own headquarters was heavily shelled between 5:30 and 8 p.m., and three men were slightly wounded. Later that evening our unit moved forward and relieved the 28th Battalion in close reserve.

Orders had been issued for another offensive. The 6th Brigade would attack the enemy trenches, Nun's Alley, Combat, and Cinnabar, on the morning of August 21. This assault would be made by the 27th and 29th Battalions, with the 28th in close support and our own in reserve. Our move would be merely a shift forward into a closer position. We occupied our new aid post after midnight on the night of August 20-21, and took our supplies forward on a stretcher. The former 19th Battalion aid post became our Battalion Headquarters and an adjoining cellar was assigned as the aid post.

At zero hour, 4:35 a.m. on August 21 the sky was clear, but there was a heavy ground mist. As was usual, our artillery opened an intense

fire on the second specified in orders. The ensuing action was a mixed up affair, and before the day was over all the units of the brigade were more or less involved. What had happened was that the Germans had launched an attack at the same time chosen by us and the waves of storming troops met in No Man's Land where they fought it out with bomb and bayonet. It was one of the most fiercely contested actions in which we were engaged during the war.

In the afternoon C and D Companies went up with a supply of bombs and ammunition after which D Company, under the command of Lieutenant Beaumont, remained and engaged in the fight. At 5:30, Lieutenants Terry and McKenzie were wounded with a shell and sent out, the latter on a stretcher. Half an hour later Lieutenant Beaumont came through wounded. C Company had one killed and six wounded. Among the casualties I treated during the afternoon was a man from the 50th Battalion, a unit of the 4th Canadian Division, to our right.

The noise of battle died down somewhat in the evening, but at 8:30 our S.O.S. went up, and the artillery on both sides burst into furious activity. At the same time the wind switched suddenly into the south-east, and blew all the smoke from the battle line back into the village. The air was full of the reek of explosives, and the smoke and brick dust formed a thick pall that made it scarcely possible for us to see across the street. The oncoming darkness, the thick clouds of smoke and dust, with the fearful din of guns and bursting shells, combined to create almost terrifying conditions.

Artillery fire was brisk during the following night but we had a bright clear morning on August 22, and as the wind veered back to the south-west, the air was again fairly free of smoke and dust.

Our division was relieved by the 3rd Canadian Division, the 9th Brigade taking over our positions. At 7 p.m. Captain Moore, medical officer of the 116th Battalion, one of the relieving units, was brought to our Regimental Aid Post with severe shell wounds of the right shoulder and arm. He had lost a considerable quantity of blood so I sent him back to the 5th Field Ambulance and notified the Assistant Director of Medical Services of the 3rd Division. I also evacuated one stretcher casualty from the 44th Battalion, and a few walking wounded. Artillery fire had not been heavy during the day, but in the evening our heavies were doing a destructive shoot into the west end of Lens.

At 1:30 a.m., August 23, a clear warm night, the relief was still incomplete. At this early hour I left Battalion Headquarters with Captain Appleyard, and started for Noulette Wood whence our unit was

moving. At 3 a.m. we were met by the grooms with our horses at the crossroads near Calonne. Just as we mounted and rode away our guns opened a barrage, and the Padre and I were treated to a wonderful display of a night bombardment. An hour's ride brought us to Noulette Wood.

When we turned out of our bunks late in the morning of August 23 the day was bright and clear with a strong southwest wind. The relief was complete, and all of the battalion had arrived in camp with nobody missing. I did not hold sick parade until 3 p.m.

Captain Appleyard had been my cabin companion, as it were, throughout the month we had been in action. He was never idle, and exerted himself to the utmost in helping to care for the wounded, and in assisting the troops in every way and by every means within his power. Even during the action of August 15, when our unit was having what might be termed a rest in reserve, Captain Appleyard went forward and spent the day with the troops taking part in the attack.

As noted earlier, the Padre suffered more than most of us when living in the trenches, for he had a sensitive skin, and the attacks of the lice with which we were infested were to him not only an annoyance and discomfort but a positive torture. I recall one fine Sunday when we were in Cité St. Pierre the padre going out to hold church services among the troops in the back country. He returned in the evening, and as we sat in the dugout Captain Appleyard remarked. "It's strange what tricks a man's imagination will play him. I had a good bath today and a complete change of underclothing, and yet now I feel as if I am lousy again. I wonder what the reason is, unless it is imagination."

"Why, Padre," I answered, "the reason is simply this, that you *are* lousy."

"How can that be so when I have just had a change of underclothing?"

I replied, "You didn't change your uniform when you made your offensive in the way of a bath and a change into clean underwear so the enemy merely retreated 'according to plan' into your serge, and now he is making a counter-attack."

The Padre made a prompt and thorough reconnaissance of the inside of his shirt and found, to his consternation and dismay, that my diagnosis of the situation was the correct one.

Except for a few days spent at Fosse 10, we had been in the line exactly a month and were all of us unspeakably dirty and lousy. However, better times were immediately ahead of us, for the whole division had

been relieved by the 3rd Canadian Division and was being withdrawn from the line for rest and refitting. Our battalion was under orders to march to Gauchin-Legal, and go into billets there on August 24. We marched out at 10:20 a.m. and reached our destination at 1:00 except for four men who were unable to march and were sent in motor trucks with the men's packs.

There is not much more to tell of my experience with the 31st Battalion. I remained for another month with my original unit, in a back training area where little occurred of an exciting nature worthy of relating. We had fairly comfortable billets and soon settled into the unexciting routine of training and rest areas. So far as my duties went one day was much like another.

Some time before this, Corporal Willis had expressed his desire to join the Royal Flying Corps. Many men were being transferred from the infantry to the air service. All such were carefully selected volunteers. I considered Willis a suitable candidate for a commission, if perfect physical condition, intelligence, keenness and a dauntless and almost reckless courage were the qualities required. I mentioned the matter to the commanding officer, and Colonel Bell said he would forward his name upon my recommendation. The applications of Willis and of Roy, the sniper, were accepted. While we were in Gauchin-Legal and they were waiting for their transfers to go through, they spent all their spare time with the signallers studying the Morse code and preparing themselves for their new duties. I also made another sacrifice for the good of the general service in parting with L./Corporal Talbourdet, the chief of my A Company stretcher bearers. I spoke to his company commander on the subject telling him that, although I would be very sorry to lose Talbourdet, I felt that he could render more valuable service as a company sergeant. He was promoted to the rank of corporal, soon after that to that of sergeant, and at the end of the war was a commissioned officer.

An event of some importance occurred on August 27 when the 6th Infantry Brigade was inspected by the British Commander in Chief, Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig. The morning was sunny with fleecy clouds drifting over before a high southwest wind. At 9:30 a.m. the battalion marched out for Estrée-Cauchie where the inspection would take place. An hour later we arrived at the parade ground in a field north of the village and formed up with the other units. Sharp at 11:45 Field Marshall Haig arrived with his staff and escort, all mounted. The Commander in Chief rode down the lines and inspected the troops, standing to attention. Later we all marched past in double column of fours. This

was my first and only sight of Sir Douglas Haig on active service but several years later I saw him in Calgary.

At the end of the month I made a summary of the casualties we had sustained during our last tour in the line. From August 9 to 22, inclusive, these amounted to 49, seven killed, and four officers and 38 other ranks wounded. There were no missing.

On the forenoon of September 7, I attended a lecture and demonstration on the use and application of the Thomas thigh splint given by Colonel Cuthbert Wallace, in the headquarters of the 5th Field Ambulance at Quatre Vents.¹³

The battalion was busy with training, including athletics. On September 9 the 31st Battalion won all the events in the brigade shooting competition. On September 11 I attended a divisional rifle competition which lasted all afternoon. Six platoons competed, two from each brigade, and the 31st carried off the first prize. The final contest, a Corps platoon competition, took place after our September 17 move to Villers au Bois, a village close behind Vimy Ridge. The event was held at Pernes on September 21, the judging being done upon general proficiency, drill, dress, steadiness, condition of arms, marksmanship, etc. Again the 31st Battalion distinguished itself, a platoon of C Company under the command of Lieutenant. M. E. Patterson took first place. The prize was an oak shield presented by Colonel Webber.¹⁴ This was the crowning triumph of the unit, and fittingly celebrated by all ranks.

We were quite comfortable at Villers au Bois in Nisson huts and besides, the village boasted divisional baths. I made use of these remaining days with the unit by instructing the stretcher bearers in the use of the Thomas splint.¹⁵

September 25 was my last full day on duty with the unit with which I had served so long, and with whom I had been associated in so many tragic adventures. My transfer was through, and I was under orders to

13 The Thomas splint extended from a ring at the hip to beyond the foot. It was used in the treatment of a fractured leg and, in conjunction with various traction and suspension devices, to immobilize and position a fractured femur.

14 No. 11 Platoon, with the finest rifle shots of the 31st Battalion, led the second place team by 72 points, a notable achievement, and one which ranked them the top platoon in the whole Canadian Corps. Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 247.

15 Battalion training included tactics of attack, bombing practice with live bombs and toughening route marches. Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 247.

report for duty with the 5th Field Ambulance at Quatre Vents. Lieut.-Col. Bell, who had just returned from leave in Paris that day, had received orders to take over command of the 4th Brigade temporarily. The battalion itself was under orders to relieve the 26th in the front line, beyond Vimy Ridge, on the evening of September 26.

I held my last 31st Battalion sick parade that morning. The weather was cloudy with a southwest wind. At 10 a.m. Captain Petrie, who was to relieve me as M.O., reported for duty. At 3 p.m. the battalion marched out for the front. As I stood with Colonel Gunn and watched the unit disappear down the road to the eastward I felt that in some manner I was shirking my duty in not going with them into the line. Colonel Bell and I were left behind in the now-deserted camp. We both left at the same time, an hour later, he to take over the command of the 4th Brigade and I to report for duty with the 5th Field Ambulance.¹⁶ The latter unit had sent a motor ambulance for me.

16 After noting that his departure “caused deep regret,” the official history of the 31st Battalion added this commendation: “In every action, Captain McGill had rendered splendid service, and many a casualty had him to thank for his care and devotion to duty. At no time had he spared himself or turned aside from danger; and every attack had meant for him long hours of unremitting work, often under the worst possible conditions.” Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 282.

EPILOGUE

Harold McGill's move to the Field Ambulance melded with his previous experience, for he had worked with the personnel from the advanced dressing stations who collected casualties from the Regimental Aid Posts and aided in the removal of the wounded from the battlefield.¹ His decision proved firm, as Emma was about to learn after she wrote him within a matter of days, suggesting that he transfer to England for the winter. The idea had been mentioned earlier, but in the meantime Harold had second thoughts: He was opposed and set forth his reasons in a letter written to Emma on October 13:

Unless my plans alter materially I shall *not* spend the winter months in England. Now do not think dear girl that the idea of being with you does not appeal to me. It most certainly does very much but I shall try to give you a few reasons for my decision. First, I left Canada to take part in the war and the war is being fought in France and Belgium and not to any extent at least in England. There are so many slackers among officers in England, men who have never been at the front and have no intention of coming if they can help it, that I wish to avoid even the appearance of being associated or connected with the bunch. Second, if I went to England for the winter I would be struck off the strength of the British Expeditionary Force and would lose my turn in any promotions over here. I am now one of the senior captains in our divisional C.A.M.C. personnel. I am now known to some extent by the senior medical officers in the division and corps and, although this may sound a bit egotistical to you, I think I am fairly favourably known. Naturally I do not like the idea of leaving and being thrown among "A generation that knows not Joseph." I have always heard that a medical officer that goes down to the base or to England from the front with rank less than that of major has a very thin time of it. The occupants of "safety first" positions look upon him with very little favour. Third, and perhaps most

1 A field ambulance, which included eleven officers and 232 other ranks, was a versatile, mobile unit, able to serve three battalions at once because it was divisible into three independent sections. Each section had a stretcher bearer subdivision for collecting the wounded and a tent subdivision for treating them. In addition to setting up advanced dressing stations and main dressing stations, not far from the front, field ambulances operated divisional and corps rest stations at the rear.

important, I do not see how we could live comfortably at present in England on Captain's pay.

Harold had joined the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance a month before the attack at Passchendaele, the last major enemy vantage point in the Ypres Salient still held after the June 7 taking of Messines Ridge. The challenge fell to the Canadian Corps and Harold's former battalion was among those charged with the capture of the village itself.

The October 21 operation order for the medical service warned of the "extreme difficulty" to be faced in evacuating the wounded. Due to "the almost complete absence of shelter of any kind," the advent of harsh weather would mean additional suffering for the wounded lying out on stretchers in the open. The journey out could also be arduous. Based upon recent experience, the estimate was "six men to a stretcher, six hours, to carry from the Regimental Aid Posts to the nearest point where wheeled ambulances were available." Night evacuation was not recommended because former landmarks and roads had been erased by shellfire, or submerged in the treacherous landscape of marsh and mud.²

On November 2 the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance arrived at the newly established advanced dressing station at Ypres prison, where its role was to evacuate wounded from the forward area using bearer personnel from its own and the 4th Field Ambulance. By 9 a.m. on November 6, three hours after the opening barrage, reports from among the large number of walking wounded arriving at the advanced dressing station indicated that the attack had gone well. Twelve hours later, all Canadian objectives had been reached, but at a high cost. The casualty count for the 31st Battalion alone was eighteen officers and 272 other ranks killed or wounded by dense artillery barrage and machine-gun fire from German pill boxes and low-flying enemy planes. Fifty-three of the N.C.O.s and men were killed, and 206 were wounded. The missing, thirteen of them, were thought to have drowned in shell holes.³

Harold explained his role to Emma in a letter written two hours before the 6 a.m. opening barrage:

We are now clearing the line and the commanding officer has given me a safety first job, i.e. I am back at Headquarters looking after the forwarding of reliefs in personnel, supplies and a dozen and one other things. I have not dressed a

2 Sir Andrew MacPhail, *The Medical Services*, Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1925, 101.

3 Singer and Peebles, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*, 276.

wounded man since we took over the line. It is quite an unusual experience for me during active operations. I suppose the commanding officer thinks I have had my share of the front line work during my two years with the battalion.

Harold stayed on advanced dressing station duty for sixteen hours and during that time some thousand walking cases, as well as about seventy wounded German prisoners, passed through.

In the sporadic fighting that followed, Ypres was bombed and shelled by heavy artillery on November 11 and 12. Harold served as orderly officer during the day, then accompanied the relief parties to Frost House, the transfer point where walking wounded were moved by lorry to the advanced dressing station at Ypres prison.

After Passchendaele, the 5th Field Ambulance took over the Corps Rest Stations at Estrée Cauchie and Fresnicourt from the British. These stations were situated towards the rear, where they provided medical care for minor cases and special clinics.

On December 9 Harold departed for England on a longed-for two weeks leave. Harold married Emma on December 12, and they spent a brief, hectic honeymoon staying at the Petrograd Hotel in London, socializing with friends and acquaintances until he returned to duty on Christmas Day. During this leave Harold was promoted to Acting Major.

Harold still hoped to accompany stretcher bearers to the Regimental Aid Posts, but opportunities to clear the line proved rare. His St. Patrick's Day letter to his sister Frances confirms the bomb-proof nature of his duties.

This is the 17th of Ireland and we have no sprigs of shamrock to wear in honour of the occasion. It is a fine warm Spring day with a strong southeast wind. We had a fire on in the messroom stove this morning but it went out and we shall not need to relight it until evening. It is a good day for airplanes and there have been large numbers of ours up all day. I haven't seen any Huns as far back as our station.

When I last wrote you I think I was running the main dressing station and our ambulance clearing the line. I was alone at the main dressing station for a month and then went back to headquarters for a time. A month of it living alone was about enough. My section is now again away on detached duty, running a small divisional rest station. At present though we have four officers in our mess, the other two section officers and the dental officer. Four in a mess make a very nice sized number. It is very much more satisfactory and also easier work when the officers are with the unit and their respective sections. It

is not often that all the officers of one section are together at a time, for a field ambulance has nearly one or more officers of the unit away relieving battalion medical officers, or on some other duty. Captains Dunham and Mossman are my two officers. You will know the former. He and I went up to headquarters last night and played bridge until 1 o'clock this morning.

The 5th Canadian Field Ambulance was one of the units that served during the great spring offensive launched by the Germans on March 21. Two and a half weeks later, his unit took over the Corps Rest Station at Guoy in Artois from the British 90th Field Ambulance. When not on dressing room duty treating the injured, Harold visited the wards. As the enemy drew closer, all lived within the sound of guns day and night. On May 8, when an attack seemed imminent, the patients were quickly cleared through discharge or return to duty. During the rest of that desperate month, enemy bombers harassed the area, artillery fire came close, and gas attacks threatened.

On June 2, within a matter of days, Harold had an offer to return to Canada. He declined, for the time being, then promptly wrote Emma, asking for her opinion.

When he wrote to his sister Frances five days later, he set forth his reasons for staying on:

I have had a chance recently to return to Canada for duty myself. The division received a cable that I was required for duty at Military District 13, Calgary. This was forwarded to my commanding officer with the query as to whether or not I could be spared. The O.C. at my request replied that for the present at least my services here were indispensable. I haven't the faintest idea of what nature is the duty for which I am wanted, but in any case the job is not likely to be of much account, and peace soldiering does not appeal to me. When I return to Canada I want my home coming to be post bellum and I shall get into civilian clothes again before the welcoming cheers have died away. Besides I have no desire to leave France so long as Margaret is here. It is true we do not see much of each other but we do meet occasionally.

When the offer to return to Canada was repeated in July, Harold again declined. He shared a few more thoughts on the subject with Frances in his letter of July 25:

Another communication has come in to our commanding officer relative to my being returned to duty in Canada. Unless I receive a direct order, in which case

of course there would be no option, I shall not go. Practically all those whom I know that have returned for duty in Canada are discontented. Of course it would be very nice to return for a holiday but I have no ambition to engage in war over there. I do not like bombs and shells any more than I did at the beginning of my active service experiences nearly three years ago, but peace soldiering has no attraction for me.

However, there was a more personal reason. Harold shared it with Emma in his July 16 letter, while commenting upon a mutual acquaintance:

I am sorry to hear that Mr. Burrell is nervous about coming over to France. It is, and is likely to be for some time, “Non bon” for people who are troubled with nerves. England is a nice country in which to do one’s soldiering, but personally I prefer to pick the safest place possible somewhere in the vicinity of the war at least, i.e., so long as I am pretending to be a soldier. I suppose though that the next time I get into a good stiff hostile bombardment I shall be wishing to Heaven that I had accepted the offer of the job in M.D. 13 back in Canada. It would take a real heavy strafe, though, to make me take a military position under the command of McGuffin who is now Assistant Director of Medical Services in the aforementioned district.

The 5th Field Ambulance served during the Last Hundred Days – the series of battles that pushed the Germans back to Mons. At the Battle of Amiens, the first Allied victory, his unit relieved the 13th Australian Field Ambulance at the Main Dressing Station at École Normale three days before the Canadian Corps launched its August 8 attack. Sufficient staff was retained at the École to clear and treat the casualties delivered from their designated advanced dressing station. The remaining personnel were detailed to other advance stations in the forward area and to the main dressing station at Château Amiens. Harold was sent to the latter, assigned to night shift dressing room duty. In his August 8 diary entry at the Château, he described the backlog caused by the arrival within hours of hundreds of stretcher cases, German prisoners among them. Here the wounded were laid out on the Château lawn to await their turn at one of eight dressing tables in continuous operation.⁴ The

4 Dressing rooms, which were equipped with all necessary medical supplies, usually contained four dressing tables with a doctor and a dresser working at each. One of



MAJOR HAROLD MCGILL TREATING SOLDIER AT DRESSING STATION DURING BATTLE OF AMIENS, FRANCE (GLENBOW ARCHIVES, NA-4938-17).

dressed cases were placed on the grounds behind the Château to await the slow arrival of ambulance cars delayed along roads choked with military traffic.

On August 11, Harold's section moved to the main dressing station at the village of Maison Blanche. Here, the enemy bombers were so active that tents could not be used. Most of the dressing had to be done in the open during the day because at night the lights showed through the canvas. On August 14 he wrote to Emma describing the nature of his duty:

the two clerks stationed at a desk at the end of the room wrote down the patient's particulars on a slip then passed it to the other who made out the medical card to be attached to the patient prior to his removal. Lieut.-Col. J. N. Gunn, *Historical Records of No. 8 Canadian Field Ambulance* – Canada, England, France, Belgium, 1915–1919 (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1920), 76.

Dearest Emma;

Please expect and accept only a few lines to let you know I am safe and well, and think about you. Our mail has not come up for three days so I cannot acknowledge the receipt of any letters from you, but I know there will be a bunch when the mail is sent up.

I went on duty, dressing, yesterday afternoon but did not have much to do. One of the patients was a German airman who had been shot down. He lived only a short time after being brought in. The enemy bombing planes were busy again last night but nothing came near us. Some big search lights have been brought forward into our area and I think these tend to keep our visitors from hovering around much. They don't like hanging around looking for targets when search lights are playing on them. The lights picked up several last night. The machines looked very pretty in the shafts of light, like huge white butterflies. We slept in our new funk pits last night and felt quite secure. There are two of us in the tent I occupy. We had two shallow trenches dug for our beds and our batmen lined these with oat sacking and ground sheets. They look quite smart. McLean is getting some hay from a nearby field to put under my blankets in the bottom of the trench. The Germans had the hay all cut ready for us.

Three of us last evening took a walk for a mile or two over the battle field of last week. We did not find much of interest except a few dead horses and the bodies of some of the enemy who had been shot as they fled before our advancing troops. We also saw everywhere the trails left by the tanks as they went forward. The weather keeps fine and dry. There was quite a good moon last evening for about an hour after dark.

Margaret's unit is now quite close to us and I shouldn't be surprised if we were clearing to them today or tomorrow. If so I shall try to get off for a few hours and go down on one of the cars taking down wounded. I could stay a little while and then come back on another car returning empty.

I shall send this to your new address as I did the one I wrote yesterday. My dressers take over the tables in 20 minutes so I shall have to close this up and get ready for work.

Your loving husband,
Harold W. McGill

P.S. The feeling of victory is a wonderfully exhilarating thing, isn't it? N.B. We have too many padres about. They are a pest. I am very glad now we didn't have one at our wedding. H.W.McG.

Four days after the Battle of Amiens, Harold recorded a different kind of medical emergency: the arrival of a large number of German stretcher cases, all seriously ill with gas gangrene. Their shell wounds had been treated by their own medics on the day of wounding, but the insidious and potentially lethal infection developed in the interim.

Harold did not serve during the Battle of Arras⁵ because he left on August 26 to spend a two-week leave with Emma. Their holiday in Scotland was more to his liking because it allowed the privacy he had hoped for on their honeymoon. When Harold returned to the front, the Second Division was holding the line.

The date for the attack on Bourlon Wood and the advance on Cambrai was set for the morning of September 27.⁶ After Cambrai and Escadœuvres fell on October 9, the 5th Field Ambulance promptly opened an advanced dressing station at the spacious Escadœuvres Convent. Two days later, during the 6th Brigade's attack on Iwuy, an estimated 1,400 casualties poured into the advanced dressing station, filling all available space in the building with stretcher cases.

The next day, Harold was promoted to temporary O.C. under circumstances that confirmed the dangerous nature of field ambulance work. His diary entry of that date recorded the arrival of his severely wounded colleagues:

14.30 K. O. C., Major Burgess, Capt. Clarke, Capt. Parker, Pte. Nichols & Gordon & Stanley, with Drs. Murphy & Lyne are brought in badly wounded. All have been injured by the same enemy shell in front of collecting post in Iwuy. Two cars have been put out of action, the Ford and Sunbeam. I dress Major Burgess who has badly shattered left forearm. O. C. is fairly badly hit. Capt. MacNeill was killed by the same shell and his body has been brought in. Capt. Parker is very badly hit as are also some of the other personnel especially Stanley and Nichols.

15K. Wounded are sent direct to the Casualty Clearing Station in one of our own cars.⁷

5 Battle of Drocourt-Quéant Line, August 26 – September 2, 1918.

6 The Battle of the Canal du Nord, September 27 – October 9, 1918.

7 Capt. A. A. Parker, MC, Pte. J. J. Nichols MSM (Meritorious Service Medal), and Pte. W. R. Stanley died of wounds. Major J. F. Burgess, who had his arm amputated at No. 33 C.C.S., was evacuated to England. Lieut.-Col. Kappel, the Commanding Officer, was eventually sent home to Canada.

That same afternoon the 5th received orders to take over the advanced dressing station at Thun Leveque to clear the portion of the line held by the 5th Brigade. Harold, now the head of Section A, the headquarters section, was detailed to set up a Divisional Rest Station at the Chocolate Factory, at St. Olle. The buildings were to be upgraded to accommodate four hundred patients in case the site had to be used as a shunt for casualties blocked by traffic on route to the Casualty Clearing Station.

The hard-fought campaign of the Last Hundred Days had forced the enemy to retreat. In doing so, the Germans rendered roads impassible by destroying bridges, culverts and road crossings and further encumbered the allied advance by driving French civilians from the areas they still held, but would soon lose, towards the Allied lines. On October 20, after the fall of Denain, the 5th Field Ambulance was asked to shelter and feed several hundred civilians, young and old, suffering from starvation and disease, who now intermingled with the units behind the line.

He wrote Emma the next day, describing how his unit coped.

Dearest Wife; –

The mail is not yet in today but I am sure there is a letter from you in it. I shall not wait for it though before writing in case I should not have any time for writing after the mail comes in. It is now 12:15 and the sun is making brave attempts to come out through the clouds. It will probably be an omen of hopefulness to the thousands of refugees who are coming down through our lines, rescued from 4 years of slavery under the Huns. We fed hundreds of them last night and provided them with shelter of sorts. Many of our boys gave up their blankets, rations and billets to help provide for the unfortunates. One chap had three babies sleeping in his bunk. The shell holes in the roofs of the buildings let in the water, but luckily very little rain fell during the night. Our cooks worked far into the night providing hot tea and soup. As I told you last night we had a considerable quantity of milk among our Red X supplies and this helped to feed the babies. We also had a big extra supply of blankets and stretchers that we had for the recent show and these came in very useful. We have still a very large number on our hands (refugees I mean) and are providing for them the best we can. Our boys are very sympathetic and work whole heartedly on the behalf of the people rescued from the clutches. Some of them have weird tales to tell of their experiences during the long four years of their captivity.

Well this tale will begin to tire you so I shall try to talk of something else. I do wish though that some of the people in their comfortable homes in Canada could see the things I have seen during the past month. They would not then be

ready to make any armistice with Heinie, especially now that we are getting the heel of our boot planted firmly over his wind pipe. He will squeal for mercy like the bully he is, but the louder he cries the harder we should hit him....

The sick refugees were evacuated to a civil hospital by motor ambulance.⁸

On November 2, two days after the new commanding officer, Major Lomer, arrived, the 5th Field Ambulance took over the new Corps Rest Station at Denain, under a special arrangement that allowed the personnel of the 14th Canadian Field Ambulance, which had arrived from England in June, to experience the envied challenge of clearing the front.

Harold described the squalid tasks his unit faced in transforming the abandoned site at Denain into a Corps Rest Station:

2/11/18

12.50 Guide shows up and leads us to group of buildings at Corner of Rue St. Armand where we are to establish a Corps Rest Station. Raining. The site is a civilian hospital almost completed at outbreak of war and which has since been used as a German prison camp. There are in all 8 buildings and a small one available for use as Officers' mess. Horse lines are in a nearby factory. A lot of high barbed wire fences intersect the grounds. Latrines and buildings are in a filthy condition. Quarters for officers and personnel, Horse Transport excepted, are all in one large two storey building with basement. Men set to work cleaning out their own quarters.

3/11/18 Cloudy morning but no rain.

8.00 K. All men are put into fatigue parties cleaning out buildings. The place is almost bare of real furniture but the rooms are full of wooden bunks and shavings.

18 K Raining.

20 .K. 4th. Canadian Field Ambulance sends us 70 patients for which we are not yet prepared. However we put them down on stretchers. The Corps stretcher & blanket pool is moving up here. There is no running water in the place as the Huns blew up the town pumping station and reservoir.

8 This was all occurring during the onset of the great Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918.
— P B.

4/11/18.

07.50 Clear bright morning. S.W. wind. Patients are being distributed to wards by Capt. Moses. B Section takes medical wards, and C the surgical, skin and scabies.

In the early afternoon of Armistice Day, Harold entered Mons in an ambulance car that was delivering three sick to the Corps Rest Station. In his diary he described the streets as being “ablaze with flags, Belgian, French, British and American, many of the latter two being improvised.” He also noted that the cheering civilians close to the ambulance were particularly attracted to the patients whom they assumed to be “wounded members of the rescuing army.”

Four days after Armistice, the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance cleared the Corps Rest Station at Denain and began its 250-mile march, accompanying the troops of the 2nd Division through Belgium and on to Bonn in Germany. Although the ceasefire had been declared,⁹ the danger of enemy retaliation was real. The advance was carried out under active service conditions with fraternization forbidden, and the enemy required to withdraw the day before the victors entered an area.¹⁰ The march to the Rhine proved long and difficult due the volume of traffic, problems with distributing rations, inadequate clothing for the men, influenza, and debilitating marches in the rain and cold. In addition to treating their own soldiers, the ambulance personnel were responsible for the sick and wounded encountered along their route through recently occupied Belgium. In more than one letter to Emma, the usually robust Harold mentioned being under the weather and too tired to write.

Now that the war had ended, the couple seriously considered the possibility of Emma returning to Canada. Harold had reason to stay on because his unit was moving into occupied Germany, but Emma did not. She had been unable to find employment due to a debilitating bout of influenza in late September and she was bored with marking time.

9 So suspicious of German intentions were the Allies that the terms of the Armistice included the provision they occupy key bridgeheads over the Rhine River so they would have an advantageous position from which to resume the fighting in 1919, if required to do so. As part of the British occupation force, the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions marched across Belgium into Germany and seized Bonn. – P B.

10 Col. A. E. Snell, *Last Hundred Days of the Great War*, 228 & 232.

The only reward for her staying on came in early January 1919, when the couple shared a holiday in Paris and the Riviera.

When Harold returned to his unit on January 28 it was stationed in Belgium at Aurelais, a coal-mining town not far from Namur, the base of the 31st Battalion. From the outset, he felt restless and discontented, in need of a change. In a February 2 letter to Emma, he put forward two possibilities:

Dearest Emma; –

Your letter of January 27 reached me this afternoon. I was surprised, and needless to say, extremely pleased to hear from you so soon. You must have reached your “Home” nearly 24 hours before I arrived at my destination.

Let me know the result of your enquiries at Cook’s regarding the trip to China. There is a rumour going around here that a certain number of M.O.s are to be sent that route in charge of drafts of coolies,¹¹ just as I surmised. I have heard no particulars so far and cannot say whether or not any provision will be made for wives to go along too. If you are allowed to accompany me, shall I accept such a job if one is offered to me?

This morning I filled in a long questionnaire regarding a Post Graduate course for army medical officers. I expressed a desire to take a course in Great Britain. Of course nothing may come of this, but the fact that such a paper was sent around for signature shows that the powers that be have taken some thought of the matter. I certainly think that M.O.s who have been with front line troops nearly four years should have the privilege of getting in some such study while still on full pay.

Certainly since coming back from leave I have felt very restless and discontented. Perhaps, in fact I feel sure, it is because I have so little to do. I miss you so much and have the strongest hope that something may come of this post graduate study business. I should like to get clear of the unit altogether and get started taking clinics in England or Scotland before it is time for you to go home. Now that you have waited so long you might as well wait another month or two until we see which way the cat jumps. The situation including the China business contains several attractive possibilities.

The post-graduate studies prospect seemed a dream come true. Such a course, taken while he was still in the army, would enhance his medical qualifications prior to a return to civil practice. The bonus involved

11 The British army had brought large numbers of Chinese “coolies” to France during the war to serve as military labour. They now had to be shipped home. – P B.

upon discharge would improve his finances, and he could live with Emma. The prospect became an overriding ambition, but, as temporary commanding officer at the time, he was duty-bound to continue until the end of February, or even beyond, if his superior officers felt he was indispensable. His questionnaire was not processed. In a letter to Emma, he confided the hope that he might be named commanding officer of his unit, considering that he had already been assigned its temporary command twice. Although a decorated major, Harold was still a junior member of the Corps. The promotion went to Major G. W. Treleven M.C. of the 4th Field Ambulance.

Both opportunities were repeated but his personal situation had changed. On February 20, the day after receiving the news that Emma was pregnant, he informed her of his decisions. He would not sign the circular that had just come in asking for the names of those wishing to go China with the coolies going home until she told him that she wished to go home at once. Taking a six-month medical course might also be problematic because he felt that Emma should be home in Canada by mid-summer.

While she had waited in England for Harold, especially after their marriage, her nursing prospects and social life had all but vanished. In early March, a low point when she was pregnant and unwell, Emma asked Harold if he was sorry that he had married her. Previously, when she expressed doubts about their hasty engagement, she had received a gentle chiding – but not this time.

Belgium, March 16/19

Dear Emma; –

Your two letters of March 10 and 11 respectively brought a bright ray of sunshine into my life this afternoon. It is a dull cold miserable day, and I do not remember having been more fed up with things in general than just before the mail came in.

In one of your letters you started out to say that you were afraid of something, and then broke off adding that you would tell me when I reached England. I hope it is nothing very serious that is worrying you.

Please accept my thanks for the tooth paste, shaving powder and soap. All will come in very useful. Are you or are you not going to send me the bill for the goods? If you do not, remember that I shall not ask you to send me anything else – not for a time anyway.

I have heard nothing further of my application for recall to England, for the purpose of proceeding to Canada with my dependent, the latter being your dear

self. A brigade staff officer was in to our mess this afternoon and informed us that our group would likely be moved to England on or about April 5. This will not be too bad if the information turns out to be correct.

Whatever made you ask me if I were sorry that we were married? The only question that ever concerned me was whether we should be married during the war or wait until it was finished. If I had decided upon the latter alternative I should not have mentioned the matter to you until the end of the war, and the Lord only knows where you would have been by this time; married to someone else perhaps. That might have been well for you but would most certainly have been bad for me.

Your loving husband,
Harold W. McGill

The medical course opportunity resurfaced at the end of March in the form of a notice that M.D.s would be allowed to remain in England for the purpose of doing post-graduate medical study, this period not to exceed six months in duration. He ignored it. The die had been cast. By then, Emma had suffered a miscarriage and was unwell, and his unit had orders to move to England prior to embarkation for Canada.

Emma remained in London after Harold arrived for dispersal at Bramshott on April 7. There is no confirmation that he managed to attend clinics before they sailed on May 10 from Liverpool aboard the transport *SS Olympic*.¹² On May 27, he was struck off strength en route home at M.D. 2, Toronto, where the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance had mobilized on November 11, 1914. On June 4 the *Calgary Daily Herald* carried a photo of Dr. H. W. McGill in uniform, under the caption, "Returns to His Civil Occupation."

The 31st Battalion sailed from Liverpool for Canada on May 19, aboard the steamship *Cedric*. On June 1, 1919, cheering Calgary throngs welcomed the reinforcements and the thinned ranks of the originals. The twice-wounded Lieutenant-Colonel E. G. Doughty, who left Calgary as second in command, was now the commanding officer, Lieut.-Col. A. H. Bell having been promoted to Brigadier-General in command of the 6th Brigade in April of 1918. The outstanding leadership of Lieut.-Col. Bell and the tenacity of the men who fought under his command, had earned the battalion a special designation – "Bell's Bulldogs."

12 The *Olympic* was the sister ship of the *RMS Titanic*.

The 31st Battalion demobilized on the same day that it returned to Calgary. Its regimental colours were deposited at the Pro-Cathedral Church of the Redeemer on July 19, then removed briefly in 1930 for the inscription of the battle honours: Ypres, 1917; Passchendaele; Amiens; Cambrai, 1918; Mount Sorrel; Somme, 1916–1918; Flers Courcellette; Vimy; and Hill 70.

After his return to Calgary in the spring of 1919, Harold rose quickly to eminence in his own profession and in politics. As early as 1920, when he was elected president of the Calgary Medical Society, local newspapers identified him as a “prominent Calgary doctor.” Within two years he was elected the Calgary member of the Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, an office which he held for a decade. In 1925 he became one of the Alberta members on the Medical Council of Canada.

His force of character, strong opinions, and the example set by his father, soon involved him in civic politics. In December 1926, he was elected to the Calgary City Council, where he served two terms as alderman. On June 19, 1930, he successfully sought higher office by winning one of the three Calgary Conservative seats in an election where the United Farmers of Alberta triumphed. His deep concern over the 1917 conscription crisis and support for the Conservatives clearly showed in the wartime letters.

Harold’s crowning achievement occurred a mere two years later when his long-time friend, R. B. Bennett, then Canada’s Conservative Prime Minister, appointed him Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs.

Before his enlistment Harold had charge of the health of the Sarcee Indians on their reserve southwest of Calgary, and in 1919, upon his return from overseas, he again served as the reservation medical officer until the federal government allocated that responsibility to the Indian Agent. The Superintendence of Indian Affairs for Canada was a powerful position comparable to that of deputy minister. Harold held the office for twelve years, until his retirement at age sixty-five.

At the time of his appointment, the *Calgary Herald*’s October 10 editorial, captioned “Ottawa Honors Calgary Citizen,” read:

Calgary is soon to lose a fine citizen in Dr. H. W. McGill, who has been appointed deputy superintendent-general of Indian affairs by the Dominion Government. Citizens of all classes will regret his departure from the city but at

the same time extend him hearty congratulations on this federal recognition of his many sterling qualities.

Dr. McGill has evinced during his residence in this city a high capacity for public service. He was an excellent alderman, and during his two years in the Legislature, he brought to the discussion of provincial affairs an enquiring mind and keen discernment. He gave evidence in the past two sessions that he was destined to become one of the most useful members of that legislative body.

He is popular among all classes of citizens, and particularly among the war veterans.¹³ He has always displayed a keen interest in their welfare, an interest that was developed during the war years when he established a fine war record.

Citizens will unite in wishing him an abundant measure of success in carrying out his highly responsible and important duties in Ottawa.¹⁴

He and Emma retired to the west coast in 1944, where they lived in Vancouver and Texada Island. Harold died at Shaunessy Hospital in Vancouver on July 3, 1961, at 81 years of age. Emma and his two daughters, Kathleen and Doris, survived him.

The impression one gets after reading Harold McGill's *Reminiscences of a Battalion M.O.* and his wartime letters to Emma is that he was a private man, who did not seek the approbation of others, but the impression one gets from his career after the war is just the opposite. He emerges very quickly as an extrovert, one whom his colleagues soon elevate to important medical boards, and one whom the voters elect to public office. He seems an enigma.

The answer may lie in the example set by his father's commitment to public service, but the determining factor was Harold's choice of a wife. Harold McGill was the kind of man who could place his life at risk during a battle but would never knowingly place his professional or social status in jeopardy.

After Harold opened a practice in the more promising young city of Calgary in 1910 he met his future wife Emma Griffis when she was the nurse in charge of the typhoid ward at the Calgary General Hospital. The earnest young doctor felt a romantic attraction even then, but the feeling was not mutual. Years later, during a 1962 visit to Calgary,

13 When first elected to city council in 1926, Harold McGill was Medical Officer of the 10th Battalion, Calgary Highlanders. Two years later he served as President of the Alberta Military Institute, and at the time of his Ottawa appointment, he was deputy Medical Officer at Military District 13.

14 "Ottawa Honours Calgary Citizen," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 14 October 1932, 4.

Emma Griffis told an interviewer that she “avoided him like the plague” at the time. Emma was an extrovert who preferred the company of outgoing young men, schooled in the social graces she so admired.

In May of 1915, when Harold left Calgary for overseas as the M.O. attached to the 31st Battalion, she was among the crowd at the station who gathered to bid farewell. She was not there for him, although he would have wished it so. He revealed these feelings to Emma much later, in an August 2, 1917, letter written three weeks after their secret engagement:

You mention the morning our battalion left Calgary. I remember the morning very well and how forlorn and miserable I felt down at the station. Everybody else had friends down to see them off but there [were] none of mine there i.e. no one who had come especially to see me, and I felt that nobody cared a damn whether I went or stayed. Did you really care for me enough at that time to feel very sorry that I was going away?

It was only after his departure for overseas that Emma’s attitude changed. She wrote letters and sent parcels and, whether intended or not, these tokens firmed his affection.

The innately ambitious Harold, who had lived a life of scholarly endeavour in order to better himself, deferred to Emma’s advice on social matters. He confessed in letters to Emma that he had never learned how to dance and, while writing about their wedding plans, Harold revealed that he knew nothing about weddings, never having been to one.

The surviving daughter, Doris McNab, remembers growing up in a home where there was always household help, freeing her mother to spend time planning afternoon teas and dinner parties to which Calgary’s social set and influential people were invited.¹⁵ Emma also belonged to the prestigious Women’s Canadian Club and endorsed her husband’s political interests through membership in the Women’s Conservative Association.

Emma was also the motivating force behind their decision to move to Ottawa. By 1932 Calgary’s doctors were facing hard times. Some, like her husband, who paid for the medicines that their poorest patients could not afford, eroded their own income. Emma foresaw a brighter future for her husband and their two daughters in Ottawa. The office

15 October 28, 2004, personal interview with surviving daughter, Mrs. Doris McNab.

of Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs carried with it a salary of \$9,000 and national status.

At the time, Premier Brownlee's U.F.A. government reigned supreme in Alberta, having won forty of the sixty-three constituencies in the 1930 election. The Liberals, who held ten seats in the legislature, led the opposition, so the views of the six Conservatives mattered little.

The twelve years they spent in the nation's capital were happy ones for Emma and the girls. She continued her active social life, enhancing contacts through teas and dinner parties, and Kathleen and Doris attended the best schools. His daughter's recollection is that her father did not really enjoy the administrative duties that came with his office. In later years he became more introverted and would withdraw from the society of others to the privacy of his books.

The relationship between Harold and Emma was symbiotic. Harold was a far-sighted man who looked to Emma for guidance. His deference is revealed early on in the most intimate among his 302 wartime letters to Emma – the one written on August 2, 1917, three weeks after their secret engagement. Having now won Emma's promise of marriage after several years of unrequited love, he bared his soul to her:

... My love for you will have only one bad effect on me from a military point of view. I am afraid of becoming a coward, for I do so want to live to try to make you happy, and also of course for the perfectly selfish reason that I wish you to make me happy, as you have already done. I do not blame you in the slightest for being troubled with doubts. Usually when a man asks a woman for the privilege of making her everlastingly happy what he really wants is for her to make him happy and worship him as a tin god. What would I not give now for a couple of hours nice quiet talk with you with nobody near to bother us? Are there not such a great many things that we could and should talk over and discuss? How did you ever come to accept me? You know I do not dance, nor have I any of the social graces. I have about as much tact as a baby giraffe, and when it comes to music, that tamer of savage breasts, I am simply *non est*. I cannot play any instrument and I have not even tried to learn. I feel my lack of musical perception as one of my great failings. One might better be born color blind. However I am very fond of music and am pleased that you can play for you will be able to give many pleasant hours in the years to come. (Selfishness again you see.) I am afraid I am one of those that Shakespeare spoke of being fit for treasons stratagems and spoils. You must take me in hand early and see what you can do for me.

APPENDIX: 31ST BATTALION CASUALTIES TO NOVEMBER 11, 1918

OFFICERS

Legend:

Died of Accidental Injury—DOAI; Died of Disease—DOD; Died of Wounds—DOW;
Drowned—Dr.; Killed in Action—KIA; Missing Presumed Dead—MPD

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
79359	Lt.	Appleby, Norman	KIA	MM*
80079	Lt.	Arbuckle, John Farabee	KIA	
696296	Lt.	Baker, Henry Alesworth	KIA	
487354	Lt.	Barnes, Rennie Hamilton	KIA	
108082	Lt.	Barnes, Wilfred Robert	KIA	MC
79615	Lt.	Bateman, Charles Arthur	KIA	
	Lt.	Boucher, Edgar Allen	KIA	
	Lt.	Buchnan, Roy Workman Pendrie	KIA	
	Lt.	Cameron, John Angus	KIA	DSO/MID
79908	Lt.	Campbell, Duncan John McLean	KIA	
	Lt.	Carson, James Henry	DOW	MC
79567	Lt.	Conrad, Ervin Simeon	KIA	
	Lt.	Cunliffe, George Alexander	KIA	
79069	Capt.	Eccles, Vernon John Lamont	KIA	
	Lt.	Eland, Reginald George Walton	KIA	
	Lt.	Finn, Edward Arthur	KIA	
79078	Lt.	Forbes, Donald Brothie	KIA	
	Major	Gilker, John Samuel	KIA	
79775	Lt.	Gordon, Charles	KIA	
	Capt.	Graham, William Nelson	DOW	MC
80040	Lt.	Irvine, Chester Hamilton	KIA	
	Capt.	Johnson, Albert Lewis Brightmore	DOW	
79218	Lt.	Keyes, Arthur Francis	MIA	
79095	Lt.	Kingsmith, Percival Edward	DOW as POW	
79866	Lt.	MacPherson, Joseph Louis	KIA	
	Lt.	McCormick, Alexander	KIA	MM
79116	Lt.	McNally, Stanley Melville	DOW	
80196	Lt.	Mee, John Norman	KIA	
160111	Lt.	Merkley, Myles Earl	KIA	
79195	Lt.	Metcalfe, Alva Elmer	DOW	MC
79754	Lt.	Morgan, Hugh Philip	KIA	MM

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
406 79183	Lt.	Morton, James MacLaren	KIA	
	Lt.	Newland, Francis Philip Douglas	KIA	MC
	Capt.	Norris, Herbert	KIA	DSO/MID
696724 79509	Lt.	Pinkham, Ernest Frederick	KIA	
	Major	Powis, Gordon Douglas	KIA	
	Lt.	Richards, Joseph Vanston	KIA	
79794	Lt.	Richmond, David	DOW	
	Lt.	Sara, John Thomas Leonard	DOW	
	Lt.	Scaddan, Charles Mansfield	DOW	
14886	Lt.	Scott, George Herbert	DOW	MC
	Lt.	Sharples, Eric Alfred	KIA	
	Lt.	Simpson, Harold Newman	DOW	
	Major	Splane, Howard Mylne	KIA	
	Lt.	Swain, Leonard Reuben	KIA	
	Lt.	Thom, Ernest Collin	KIA	
	Lt.	Tofft, Paul George	KIA	
	Lt.	Toole, Edward Thomas	KIA	
	Capt.	Whyte, Wilfred	DOW	MC

RANKS

Legend:

Died of Accidental Injury—DOAI; Died of Disease—DOD; Died of Wounds—DOW;
Drowned—Dr.; Killed in Action—KIA; Missing Presumed Dead—MPD

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
80005	Sgt.	Abbott, Albert Frederick	DOW	
446906	Pte.	Adam, Graham Edward	MPD	
79806	Pte.	Adamson, Arthur Robert	KIA	
446148	Pte.	Adamson, John Grey Cumming	KIA	
184241	Pte.	Adsett, John Wesley	KIA	
696317	Pte.	Adsit, Walter Roy	DOW	
434100	Cpl.	Aitken, Duncan	KIA	
2621866	Pte.	Aitken, George	KIA	
80276	Pte.	Aitken, Robert	KIA	
160884	Pte.	Alcock, Arthur Henry	KIA	
160592	Pte.	Alcock, James	KIA	
100381	Pte.	Alderson, Charles	KIA	
80138	L/Cpl.	Allan, George Francis	KIA	
79033	Cpl.	Allan, John Martin	KIA	
13813	Pte.	Allardyce, John Harris	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
18837	Cpl.	Allison, John	DOW	
737113	Pte.	Anderson, Alexander	KIA	
80006	Cpl.	Anderson, David S.	KIA	
696554	Pte.	Anderson, John Claud	KIA	
430381	Pte.	Anderson, John Joseph	MPD	
115964	Pte.	Anderson, Louis Henry	DOW	
424519	Pte.	Armstrong, Alexander William	DOW	
186010	Pte.	Armstrong, George Harvey	KIA	
101484	Pte.	Ashford, Arthur	DOW	
79032	Pte.	Ashton, Henry Charles	KIA	
808040	Pte.	Ashton, Richard George	MPD	
696933	Pte.	Atkinson, Arthur Herbert	KIA	
231382	Pte.	Atkinson, Robert Edward	KIA	
446241	Pte.	Attard, Antonio	KIA	
425705	L/Cpl.	Austin, George Bell	KIA	
183614	Pte.	Austin, Therman	DOW	
80125	Sgt.	Avery, Thomas	KIA	
811953	Pte.	Baggett, Mark Guy	DOW	
80146	Pte.	Baillie, George	DOW	
435568	Pte.	Baker, Bernard George	KIA	
874283	Pte.	Baldwin , William	MPD	
696485	Pte.	Balkenstein, Dirk Laurens	DOW	
79897	Pte.	Bannan, James Charles	KIA	
79170	Sgt.	Barclay, Joseph Wright	KIA	
160670	Pte.	Barker, John Sydney	DOW	
4100708	Pte.	Barley, Arthur Henry	KIA	
79282	L/Sgt.	Barnes, Edward	DOW	MM
183648	Pte.	Barnes, Percival Joseph	KIA	
100819	Pte.	Barron, John	DOW	
472403	Pte.	Barry, Otis	KIA	
696224	Pte.	Baxter, George Lindsay	MPD	
79368	Pte.	Beach, Oliver Massey	DOW	
2137966	Pte.	Bearn, Ralph	KIA	
79163	Sgt.	Beaton, Donald	KIA	
430076	Pte.	Beaton, Heath Eardley	MPD	
809127	Pte.	Beattie, Frank McDonald	DOW	
79165	Sgt.	Beattie, William Fenwick	KIA	
602383	Pte.	Bell, John	KIA	
79900	Pte.	Bell, John Alexander	KIA	
144919	Pte.	Bell, John Thomas	DOW	
446589	L/Cpl.	Benjamin, William	KIA	
79901	L/Cpl.	Bennett, Frank	DOW	
80278	Pte.	Benoit, Simon James	KIA	
231203	Pte.	Bentley, James Stanwood	KIA	
424568	Pte.	Benwell, Thomas Leslie	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
696800	Pte.	Berget, Ole	MPD	
473225	Pte.	Berry, John	KIA	
161100	Pte.	Berry, Walter	DOW	
184156	Pte.	Berube, Frank	MPD	
2621843	Pte.	Bilkey, Frank	KIA	
2621897	Pte.	Bird, John Harvey	KIA	
434190	Pte.	Birkill, Thomas Michael	MPD	
100047	Pte.	Bissett, Robert	KIA	
435450	Pte.	Bissonnette, Louis	DOW	
467508	Pte.	Black, William	MPD	
77977	Pte.	Blair, John	DOW	
696502	Pte.	Blakeley, William Edward	DOW	
435434	Pte.	Blight, Harry	KIA	
79614	Sgt.	Bliss, Frederick	KIA	
696251	Pte.	Blossom, Wilbert Ernest	KIA	
231484	Pte.	Boardman, Albert Tuttle	DOW	
3207390	Pte.	Bodwell, Jared Fletcher	DOD	
696669	Pte.	Boles, David E.	KIA	
696848	Pte.	Borthwick, Stephen Alexander	KIA	
231277	Pte.	Botsford, John McKinley	DOW	
2355608	Pte.	Bouhey, George Edward	MPD	
79162	Sgt.	Boulden, Percy	KIA	
446572	Pte.	Bourns, William Percy	KIA	
3314273	Pte.	Bowerman, John William	KIA	
183645	Pte.	Bowker, John Henry Gamble	KIA	
408395	Pte.	Bowman, Ormand Robert	KIA	
79344	Pte.	Boyce, Samuel Loyd	KIA	
3205911	Pte.	Bramwell, William Francis	KIA	
160359	Pte.	Brazeau, George	KIA	
80008	Pte.	Bremner, Thomas	DOD	
79284	Pte.	Brewster, Charles	DOW	
79172	L./Cpl.	Broadhead, Keith Harris	KIA	
101123	Cpl.	Brown, James Graham	KIA	
79242	Pte.	Brown, John	KIA	
79363	Pte.	Brown, Joseph E.	DOW	
696901	Pte.	Brown, Joseph	KIA	
231276	Pte.	Brunyee, John	KIA	
79362	Pte.	Buchan, John	KIA	
447255	CSM	Buckley, John Albert	KIA	
183511	Pte.	Buist, Robert Henderson	KIA	
183664	Pte.	Bunyan, Nicol	KIA	
231467	Pte.	Burchell, Thomas Edward	KIA	
18478	Pte.	Burke, Thomas	KIA	
80009	Pte.	Burney, Hugh	KIA	
80012	Pte.	Burwell, William Henry	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
2109929	Pte.	Bury, Charles Lewis	KIA	
183604	Pte.	Butcher, Noel Stanley	MPD	
79169	Pte.	Butler, James Vernon	DOD	
430276	Pte.	Butterfield, Philip	DOW	
79243	Pte.	Buttress, Frank	DOW	
79517	Pte.	Cagney, John	DOW	
80030	Pte.	Caldcleugh, Edwin Gordon	KIA	
435048	Pte.	Calkins, Bruce	DOW	
79054	Pte.	Callaghan, Louis Eric	KIA	
2355374	Pte.	Cameron, Hugh Donald	KIA	
446372	L/Cpl.	Campbell, Alexander	DOW	
430286	Pte.	Campbell, Frank Harold	KIA	
231558	Pte.	Campbell, Harry Blair	KIA	
430085	Pte.	Campbell, James	KIA	
80017	Cpl.	Campbell, John Alexander	KIA	
808635	Pte.	Campbell, Newman Hall	KIA	
79237	Pte.	Campbell, Pius J.	DOW	
424647	Pte.	Campbell, Stewart Laughlan	MPD	
79453	Sgt.	Campbell, William	KIA	
3314082	Pte.	Canavan, Peter	KIA	
696796	Pte.	Cannon, Alfred	MPD	
183988	Pte.	Cantrell, James	MPD	
808928	Pte.	Capucci, Nazareno	KIA	
883558	Pte.	Carr, Frederick Elmer	MPD	
446029	Pte.	Carson, Cecil Metcalf	KIA	
434375	Pte.	Chadwick, John Frederick	KIA	
79160	L/Sgt.	Chalker, Wallace	DOW	
424658	Pte.	Chard, Roy Albert	KIA	
424671	Pte.	Clark, Francis William	KIA	
446432	Pte.	Clarke, Harold	MPD	
80280	Pte.	Clarkson, Lorne	KIA	
3205476	Pte.	Cleary, John	KIA	
446061	Pte.	Clifton, Frederick	MPD	
79375	Pte.	Coad, Reginald George	KIA	
696844	Pte.	Coates, Clarence Roy	MPD	
696875	Pte.	Coghill, Albert Charles	MPD	
79377	Sgt.	Coldwell, William Ewart	KIA	
80222	Pte.	Coleman, John	DOW	
808994	Pte.	Collin, Wilfred Joseph	KIA	
446339	Pte.	Collins, Edward Charles	DOW	
424693	Pte.	Collins, Victor	KIA	
79154	CSM	Colson, Henry	KIA	MM
3205538	Pte.	Comfort, Alexander McKenzie	DOW	
79052	L/Cpl.	Condon, James F. B.	KIA	
2621931	Pte.	Conery, Rylon Edward (aka John Bayles)	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
231593	Pte.	Connelly, Ivan Winfield	KIA	
696659	Pte.	Conning, John	DOW	
730445	Pte.	Connolly, Eran Bernard	KIA	
696746	Pte.	Connolly, Thomas	KIA	
79566	Pte.	Cook, William	KIA	
160649	Pte.	Coombes, John	DOD	
80223	Pte.	Corbett, Roger John	KIA	
183953	Pte.	Corby, Harry	MPD	
101611	Pte.	Coutts, Charles Robertson	KIA	
79022	Cpl.	Cox, Herbert Charles	KIA	
231105	Pte.	Cox, James Huston	KIA	
79386	L/Cpl.	Crain, Percy Lewis	KIA	
183579	Pte.	Crane, Horace Frederick	KIA	
79816	Pte.	Crasswaller, John	DOD	
160657	Pte.	Crawford, Albert Burwell	KIA	
231582	Pte.	Crawford, John Louden	MPD	
80201	L/Sgt.	Cressey, Harold Sydney	KIA	MM
79235	Sgt.	Crossland, William Atkin	KIA	
231315	Pte.	Crow, Frederick John	KIA	
425650	Pte.	Cruise, Robert Wallace	DOW	
446823	Pte.	Cullen, Basil Lyn	KIA	
811357	Pte.	Cumming, Andrew Earl	KIA	
808604	Pte.	Cumming, George	KIA	
2138287	Pte.	Cupples, David	DOW	
183565	Pte.	Currie, Andrew	KIA	
80112	Pte.	Currie, Arthur	DOW	
80016	L/Cpl.	Curtis, Cyril Francis	KIA	
79917	Pte.	Cutler, Thomas	KIA	
446600	Cpl.	Cutmore, Ernest Walter	KIA	MM
79230	Sgt.	Dalziel, Walter	KIA	DCM
446705	Pte.	Darling, David	KIA	
101066	Pte.	Darragh, John Edward	DOW	
80130	Pte.	Davenport, Alfred Riley	KIA	
79388	L/Cpl.	Davidson, Alexander Will	DOW	
231290	Pte.	Davidson, Archie	MPD	
425709	Pte.	Davidson, Frank Robert	KIA	
80279	Pte.	Davidson, William Malcom	KIA	
2621919	Pte.	Davis, Albert Edward	DOW	
696861	Pte.	Davis, Frederick	KIA	
79829	Pte.	Dawson, Henry James	KIA	
602746	Pte.	Deadman, William James	KIA	
127078	Pte.	Deal, Albert Edward	DOW	
2021955	Pte.	Dean, George	DOW	
115838	Pte.	Delamere, Samuel	DOW	
883641	Pte.	Derouin, Joseph	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
624622	Pte.	De Santos, John	MPD	
461506	Pte.	Dewar, William James	KIA	
79392	Pte.	Diffey, Herbert Edward	KIA	
100820	Pte.	Dixon, George Edwin	MPD	
2621943	Pte.	Dobias , Louis Henry	KIA/Dr.	
80021	Pte.	Dobson, Ingram	DOAI	
809148	Pte.	Dodds, John George Weatherburn	KIA	
183887	Cpl.	Dodridge, Percy Cyril	KIA	
19266	Pte.	Doheny, James	KIA	
79827	Pte.	Doherty, James Henry	KIA	
19116	Pte.	Doleman, William	DOW	
430058	Pte.	Donald, Alexander	KIA	
160075	L/Sgt.	Donaldson, David	KIA	
183555	Cpl.	Donegan, Gordon William	KIA	
161308	Pte.	Donnelly, William Herbert	KIA	
79024	Pte.	Douglass, Charles Deane	KIA	
434764	Pte.	Dower, John	KIA	
808370	Pte.	Downing, George Abraham	KIA	
808253	Pte.	Downing, William James	DOW	
231516	Pte.	Doyle, James Henry	DOW	
696042	Pte.	Dravinski, John Peter	DOW	
160691	Pte.	Duff, John	KIA	
79229	L/Cpl.	Duff, John William	DOW	
100491	Pte.	Duffy, Hillard William	KIA	
808578	Pte.	Duhaime, Nelson	MPD	
231811	Pte.	Duncan, James Edwin	KIA	
231428	Pte.	Duncan, William John	MPD	
3232971	Pte.	Dunn, Andrew	KIA	
231177	Pte.	Dunn, Robert Ellis	KIA	
446084	Pte.	Dyer, John Beecher	KIA	
446283	Pte.	Eagle, Frederick George	KIA	
808255	Pte.	Eccles, Albert Edward	MPD	
79397	Sgt.	Edgar, David William	KIA	
2115465	Pte.	Edstrom, Charles Emil	KIA	
160180	Pte.	Edwards, Frederick	KIA	
231377	Pte.	Elliott, Edgar Gould	KIA	
79066	Pte.	Elliott, Harry	KIA	
79394	L/Sgt.	Elliott, Wellington Roy	KIA	
472040	Pte.	Elliott, Wellington Wilfred	DOW	
430055	Pte.	Elliott, William	KIA	
183491	Pte.	Ellis, Martin Lawford	KIA	
160391	Pte.	Ellis, Thomas	KIA	
231617	Pte.	Ellis, Thomas	MPD	
696286	Pte.	Elsey, John Thomas	KIA	
80023	Sgt.	Emslie, John Watson	KIA	MM

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
696727	Pte.	Ericksen, Clarence Guy	MPD	
696786	Pte.	Erskine, William Robert	KIA	
101112	Pte.	Evans, Cecil Samuel	MPD	
152908	Pte.	Evans, Edward	KIA	
434506	Pte.	Evans, Edwin Maskell	KIA	
79067	Pte.	Evans, George Oscar	KIA	
101028	Pte.	Evans, Thomas	DOW	
79522	Cpl.	Evans, William Rhys	DOW	
100667	Pte.	Eyre, Wilfred	KIA	
697054	Pte.	Falconer, Alexander	DOW	
183536	Pte.	Farquhar, William	KIA	
231037	Pte.	Fenby, Herbert	KIA	
2527340	Pte.	Fennell, William	DOW	
148583	Pte.	Ferguson, John	DOW	
2115769	Pte.	Fergusson, Archibald MacKenzie	KIA	
231145	Pte.	Ferris, William Henry	KIA	
101526	Pte.	Field, Joe	KIA	
603090	Pte.	Figuers, Henry James	DOW	
160921	Pte.	Fiske, Kenneth Reginald	KIA	
100874	Pte.	Flynn, Daniel Joseph	DOW	
79140	Pte.	Ford, Albert James	KIA	
2621831	Pte.	Ford, Wilfred	KIA	
160217	Pte.	Ford, William James	KIA	
80252	Pte.	Forshaw, Alfred Edmund	KIA	
80025	Pte.	Forster, William	KIA	
183608	Pte.	Fortune, George Crinklaw	KIA	
160426	Pte.	Foster, Joseph	KIA	
161028	Pte.	Franklin, Albert Edward	KIA	
424801	Pte.	Franklin, James	KIA	
79227	Cpl.	Fraser, Alexander Paul	KIA	
883807	Pte.	Fraser, Bert	DOD	
79142	Cpl.	Fraser, Roy St. Clair	KIA	
808952	Pte.	Fraser, William Wallace	KIA	
183305	Pte.	Frederick, Charles	DOW	
808696	Pte.	Frith, Frederick Harvey	DOW	
231122	Pte.	Fuller, John Henry	KIA	
696341	Pte.	Fulton, Emanuel	KIA	
808603	Pte.	Furley, George Frederick	DOW	
532441	Pte.	Gaetz, Rudolph Francis Godfrey	KIA	
447083	CSM	Galloway, Howard Elmer	KIA	
101545	Pte.	Galway, James Lea	DOW	
80169	Pte.	Gardiner, Orvil Earl	DOW	
424815	Pte.	Gardner, Thomas	KIA	
79928	L/Cpl.	Garrison, Harry	KIA	MM
79224	Sgt.	Gay, Aubrey Henry	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
160065	Pte.	Geddes, Andrew Crichton	KIA	
79577	Cpl.	George, Desmond St. Clair	KIA	
19477	Pte.	Gibbs, George William	DOW	
80268	Pte.	Gillespie, John Allan	DOW	
79834	Pte.	Gillison, Douglas	KIA	
697019	Pte.	Gilman, Clarence Irving	MPD	
425550	Cpl.	Gilroy, Herbert	KIA	
79838	Cpl.	Gittins, William Albert	KIA	
696578	Pte.	Givin, Clarence	MPD	
808906	Pte.	Glasscock, Gerald John	DOW	
79576	Pte.	Glover, Frederick H.	KIA	
79316	Sgt.	Goad, Arthur H.	KIA	
430264	Pte.	Goggs, Frank	KIA	
101426	Pte.	Good, Julius Harry	KIA	
160727	Pte.	Gooderham, Roderick Malcolm	KIA	
466779	Pte.	Gordon, Ivie Graham	DOW	
696330	Pte.	Gordon, Ralph Orlo	KIA	
231068	Pte.	Gower, Harry Robert	KIA	
434896	Pte.	Graham, Frederick George	MPD	
79774	Pte.	Grant, David Kenneth	DOW	
434439	Pte.	Grant, Frederick James	DOW	
79840	Pte.	Grant, James	MPD	
184212	Pte.	Grant, James Fraser	MPD	
424845	Pte.	Grawbarger, George	DOW	
624820	Pte.	Gray, John Elmer	KIA	
183675	Pte.	Gray, Thomas	KIA	
100960	Pte.	Grayburn, Arthur	KIA	
446795	Cpl.	Green, Roy Leslie	DOW	
79077	Pte.	Greenough, Thomas	DOW	
447757	Pte.	Gregalait, Constantin	KIA	
2621996	Pte.	Grieve, William	KIA	
3206541	Pte.	Groff, Harold Rogers	DOW	
424853	L/Cpl.	Gross, Harold Angus	KIA	
79083	Pte.	Groves, Arthur John	KIA	
79076	Pte.	Gruzelier, Cecil	KIA	
184011	Pte.	Gurney, Arthur Edwin	KIA	
79132	Pte.	Guscott, Tom Arthur	KIA	
2022018	Pte.	Gustafson, Oscar	DOW	
446443	Pte.	Gwilliam, Frederick	KIA	
100986	Pte.	Haggerty, Arthur	KIA	
80086	Pte.	Hamon, Philip John	KIA	
466004	Pte.	Hand, Charles Henry	DOD	
161298	Pte.	Hannah, John Duff	DOW	
696774	Pte.	Hanslip, Albert George	KIA	
3130464	Pte.	Hanson, Ernest Edward	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
2355392	Pte.	Hardman, Thomas	KIA	
79842	Pte.	Hardy, Leonard Mackintosh	KIA	
701280	Pte.	Hargreaves, Walter	KIA	
696220	Pte.	Harmon , Winfield	KIA	
472371	Pte.	Harris, Herbert Thomas	KIA	
430196	Pte.	Harris, Leonard Gambell	KIA	
424884	Pte.	Harris, Ralph Norman	KIA	
160734	Pte.	Harrison, Frederick	MPD	
696534	Pte.	Harvey, Arthur Owen	KIA	
2330432	Pte.	Harvey, Austin Elsie	KIA	
79767	Pte.	Harvey, Jesse	KIA	
808451	Pte.	Harvey, John Coline	DOW	
79267	Cpl.	Haslam, John Marven	KIA	
79330	Pte.	Hawker, Harry	MPD	
446697	L/Cpl.	Hawkins, William Henry	KIA	
883532	L/Cpl.	Hazelton, John Douglas	DOW	
883440	Pte.	Heath, Francis Charles	KIA	
3131375	Pte.	Heffernan, Edward Joseph	KIA	
883513	Pte.	Helem, William Robert	KIA	
446376	Pte.	Hellawell, Thomas	KIA	
80039	Cpl.	Henderson, Thomas	KIA	
883225	Pte.	Hermansen, August	KIA	
80160	Pte.	Hewitt, Alfred James	KIA	
161060	Pte.	Hicks, Charles Hamilton	DOW	
808693	Pte.	Hicks, Ernest Kennedy	KIA	
883197	Pte.	Hicks, Hiram Prideaux	DOW	
883310	Pte.	Hildreth, James Gordon	KIA	
80153	Pte.	Hoad, William Frederick	DOW	
883048	Pte.	Hodge, Charles Frederick	KIA	
2355559	Pte.	Hodge, Richard Francis	KIA	
883805	Pte.	Hodgkins, John Walter	KIA	
435827	Pte.	Hogarth, Percy	KIA	
115425	L/Cpl.	Holborn, Charles Sydney	KIA	
736010	Pte.	Holder, John George	KIA	
430939	Pte.	Holland, William	MPD	
696292	Pte.	Holm, Henning Hendriksen	KIA	
184126	Sgt.	Holmes, Austin Holway	KIA	MM*
80237	Cpl.	Hooton, William	KIA	
79580	Pte.	Hopkins, Sydney Henry	KIA	
696941	Pte.	Hornett, Alfred Ernest	KIA	
100714	Pte.	Horrocks, Richard	KIA	
883118	Pte.	Howard, Jackson	KIA	
808949	Pte.	Hrihoriev, Filip	DOW	
696526	Pte.	Hughes, John	KIA	
808644	Pte.	Hughes, Lewis	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
183486	Pte.	Hughson, Harry Everette	KIA	MM
101425	Pte.	Huguet, Ernest Rene	DOW	
231431	Pte.	Humphreys, Robert Charles	KIA	
115569	Pte.	Hunt, Charles James	KIA	
161287	Pte.	Hunt, George Stanley	KIA	
115660	Pte.	Hunt, Lionel Tom	KIA	
231781	Pte.	Hunter, James	KIA	
895488	Pte.	Hutton, Clemens Percy Richmond	KIA	
808101	Pte.	Huxley, Fred Russell	KIA	
79940	Pte.	Imrie, William James	KIA	
183912	Pte.	Inglis, Joseph	KIA	
696793	Pte.	Ingram, John James	MPD	
79529	Pte.	Inkster, Adam Francis Rankin	MPD	
79221	L/Cpl.	Inkster, John Collin	KIA	
808273	Pte.	Irven, Earl	KIA	
424952	L/Cpl.	Ivens, Charles John	DOW	
101060	Pte.	Jacklin, Roy	KIA	
160715	Pte.	Jackson, Edward James	KIA	
696718	Pte.	Jackson, George R. Ernest	KIA	
696835	Pte.	Jackson, Joseph Harold	MPD	
80041	Pte.	Jacobs, Archibald Chisholm	DOW	
434315	Pte.	James, Frederick V.	KIA	
101317	Pte.	James, Joseph	KIA	
79766	Pte.	James, Orrmonde Lucas	KIA	
101271	Pte.	James, William	KIA	
430307	Pte.	James, William Henry	KIA	
809137	Pte.	Jamieson, Herbert Faulker	DOW as POW	
2109853	Pte.	Jensen, Frederick	DOW	
101649	Pte.	Jobel, Emil	KIA	
79456	Sgt.	Jobling, Edward Seymour	DOW	
101528	Pte.	Johnson, Arthur Albert	KIA	
696103	Pte.	Johnson, Cyrus Earl	KIA	
101127	L/Cpl.	Johnson, Percy S.	KIA	
79588	Sgt.	Johnston, Joseph Noble	KIA	
447689	Pte.	Johnston, Samuel Everett	MPD	
696168	Pte.	Johnston, William Arthur	DOW	
424966	Pte.	Johnston, William Henderson	KIA	
79941	Pte.	Jones, Benjamin	KIA	
231289	Pte.	Jones, David	KIA	
160826	Pte.	Jones, Frank (aka George Frederick Thomas Hayward)	KIA	
696134	Pte.	Jones, Isaac	KIA	
79850	Pte.	Jones, Robert	KIA	
100421	Pte.	Jones, Rufus Franklin	MPD	
80197	Pte.	Jones, William	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
737233	Pte.	Jovetich, Peter	KIA	
79269	Pte.	Jull, George Fred	KIA	
101613	Pte.	Junck, Vincent Henry	KIA	
898197	Pte.	Kachina, Nicholas	KIA	
2622022	Pte.	Kain, John	KIA	
808312	Pte.	Kane, Charles	KIA	
898347	Pte.	Karpuk, George	KIA	
79219	Cpl.	Keith, James Milne	KIA	
183719	Pte.	Kelly, Ernest Patrick	DOW	
808301	Pte.	Kelly, John Taylor	DOW	
160597	Pte.	Kelly, Timothy	DOW	
79306	Sgt.	Kemp, Alfred James	KIA	
808029	Pte.	Kennedy, Harold William	KIA	
79589	Pte.	Kenworthy, John Leigh	DOW	
654389	Pte.	Kerr, Angus Duncan	KIA	
79213	Pte.	Keyes, William Edward George	MPD	
808798	L/Cpl.	Kidd, James	MPD	
811456	Pte.	Kidd, William	KIA	
696247	Pte.	Kimball, Joseph	MPD	
3205597	Pte.	King, Frederick William	KIA	
80212	Pte.	King, Henry	DOW as POW	
80191	Pte.	King, Walter Nike	KIA	
183802	Pte.	Kinnear, George Watson	KIA	
231189	Pte.	Kinsella, Wray Wilfred	KIA	
79214	Pte.	Kirkman, Charles Frederick	KIA	
434975	Pte.	Knott, William	KIA	
696503	Pte.	Kuntz, Charles	KIA	
2621968	Pte.	Labrie, Louis Gonzaque	KIA	
3131406	Pte.	Laforet, Ernest D.	KIA	
811795	Pte.	Lafranier, Gordon Alexander	DOW	
3130259	Pte.	Laidlaw, William James	KIA	
654200	Pte.	Laird, Robert John	DOW	
447731	Pte.	Lambert, William Edward	DOW	
79759	Pte.	Lancaster, Charles	MPD	
447119	Pte.	Langlands, John Alexander	KIA	
425010	Pte.	Langridge, Henry Arthur	KIA	
446910	Pte.	Laurie, Alexander	KIA	
425015	Pte.	Law, Albert John William	KIA	
696493	Pte.	Leach, John	KIA	
216099	Pte.	LeClair, Frank	DOW	
425713	Pte.	Lee, Elgin Russell	DOW	
79211	Pte.	Lee, John Fletcher	DOW	
183336	Pte.	Lee, John Pendlebury	DOD	
3131414	Pte.	Leeder, Herbert Nicholson	KIA	
80284	Pte.	Leeman, Thomas Sands	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
812128	Pte.	Legay, Thomas	DOS	
808225	Pte.	Leif, Wilfred Ruthford	MPD	
79853	Sgt.	Leish, Harry L.	KIA	
2621904	Pte.	Lemnoux, John	DOW	
523284	Pte.	Lewis, William Raymond	DOW	
447404	Pte.	Light, Alan Northeast	KIA	
625234	Pte.	Lightle, Allen Isaac	KIA	
2109904	Pte.	Lind, Andrew	KIA	
466504	Pte.	Lister, Thomas	DOW	
101281	Pte.	Lloyd, Clarence	KIA	
79305	Pte.	Lloyd, James Oscar	KIA	
231325	Pte.	Lobban, Edward Alfred	KIA	
506292	Pte.	Lock, Francis Cornelius	KIA	
696257	Pte.	Lockyer, John	KIA	
115136	Pte.	Logan, Sheraton Bernard	KIA	
809132	Pte.	Lomax, George	DOD	
809182	Pte.	Lomax, John	DOW	
3130267	Pte.	Loomis, Sampson Alexander	DOW	
79530	Sgt.	Loucks, Stanley	DOAI	
79301	Pte.	Loughborough, Ernest	KIA	
696820	Pte.	Loveland, Charles Victor	DOW	
79009	Pte.	Lovell, Leonard	KIA	
231316	Pte.	Low, Charles Thomas	KIA	
467056	Pte.	Luxton, Harold Malloch	KIA	
79191	Cpl.	Macaldin, Thomas G.	KIA	
79423	Sgt.	Macbeth, Frederick Hugh	KIA	
425586	Pte.	MacDonald, Alexander Ross	KIA	
435718	Pte.	Macdonald, Allan	MPD	
101630	Pte.	Macdonald, Charles Angus	KIA	
160173	Pte.	Macdonald, John	DOW	
696312	Pte.	MacDonald, Joseph Campbell Gordon	KIA	
225101	Pte.	MacFarland, James Edward	DOD	
80043	Pte.	MacGregor, William	KIA	
447618	Pte.	Macintosh, James Herbert	KIA	
430007	L/Cpl.	Mackay, Neil	KIA	MM
231268	Pte.	MacNeil, Forbes Torquil	DOW	
447135	Pte.	MacPherson, Charles Joseph	DOD	
100677	L/Sgt.	Macpherson, George	KIA	
79113	Sgt.	MacRae, Donald	KIA	DCM
100483	Pte.	Madden, Ernest W.	DOD	
183529	Pte.	Maguire, John	KIA	
160726	L/Cpl.	Maitland, Guy Reginald Andrew	KIA	
231712	Pte.	Major, Charles Robson	KIA	
696766	L/Cpl.	Maley, Hadden	KIA	
79945	Pte.	Mallory, Harry	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
696246	Cpl.	Malone, Joseph V.	KIA	
808888	Pte.	Manley, William John	KIA	
79196	Pte.	Mann, Albert James	MPD	
101251	Pte.	Mann, Lawrence	KIA	
79197	Pte.	Manning, Charles B.	KIA	
79946	Pte.	March, William	KIA	
80003	Cpl.	Marment, Verriour Wynne	KIA	
895506	Pte.	Marquis, Gerard J.	DOW	
446897	Pte.	Marsh, George Alfred	DOW	
425054	Pte.	Marsh, Gilbert	KIA	
446526	Pte.	Marsh, William John	MPD	
2115473	Pte.	Marshall, Angus Alexander	DOW	
727035	Pte.	Martin, Frederick George	DOW	
425055	Pte.	Martin, George Harold	KIA	
696067	L/Cpl.	Mathews, George Benjamin	DOW	MM
100771	Pte.	Matthews, Henry John	KIA	
231608	Cpl.	Matthews, John George	DOW	
809120	Pte.	Matthews, William Ernest	KIA	
79416	Pte.	Matthewson, Thomas	DOW	
2356248	Pte.	Mayhew, William	KIA	
100448	Pte.	McAlister, Archibald John	KIA	
231666	Pte.	McAllister, Russell Scobie	KIA	
101009	Pte.	McArthur, John	MPD	
436938	Pte.	McBain, Alexander	DOW	
184028	Pte.	McBain, William	KIA	
79537	Pte.	McCleary, William	KIA	
425121	Pte.	McColl, Garnet Howard	KIA	
434797	Pte.	McCombe, Albert	KIA	
808089	Pte.	McCracken, James	DOW	
435179	Pte.	McCracken, William	KIA	
454016	Pte.	McCreedy, Howard Charles Pretoria	KIA	
435824	Pte.	McCulloch, Thomas	KIA	MM
231708	Pte.	McDiarmid, Duncan David	KIA	
100838	Pte.	McDonald, Archibald	KIA	
101574	Pte.	McDonough, Edmond Albert	KIA	
446473	Cpl.	McDougall, Colin Francis	MPD	
435438	Pte.	McDowall, Douglas	DOW	
101678	Pte.	McDowell, Eugene Ivan	KIA	
466637	Pte.	McGonigal, Vincent	KIA	
79182	Pte.	McInnes, Finlay D.	KIA	
2621868	Pte.	McIntosh, John Duguid	KIA	
183456	Pte.	McIsaac, Joseph	DOW	
696438	Pte.	McKay, William Arthur	KIA	
696815	Pte.	McKie, Vernon Heath	KIA	
79257	Pte.	McKie, William Miller	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
80045	Pte.	McKinnon, William	KIA	
80172	Pte.	McKinnon, William Daniel	KIA	
79533	Pte.	McLean, Ivan	KIA	
425148	L/Cpl.	McLean, William	KIA	MM
79536	Pte.	McLennan, Kenneth	DOW	
79110	Pte.	McLeod, Donald	DOW	
2138758	Pte.	McLeod, Norman	DOW	
160652	Pte.	McMillan, Alfred George	KIA	
446480	Sgt.	McMullen, Claude Clifton	KIA	
808921	Pte.	McMurtry, Roy Fothergill	KIA	
696420	Pte.	McNabb, Mervin Carlyle	KIA	
80077	Sgt.	McNair, Archibald	KIA	
472359	Pte.	McQuade, William	DOW	MM
446929	Cpl.	McWalter, John	DOW	
446223	Pte.	McWilliams, John	KIA	
79758	Pte.	Mearns, John	KIA	
183666	Pte.	Meechan, Peter	MPD	
529238	Pte.	Meers, Arthur Ernest	KIA	
446966	Sgt.	Melvin, Arthur E.	KIA	
2621849	Pte.	Metters, Leonard	KIA	
696617	Pte.	Mewton, Leo John Morgan	DOW	
160444	Pte.	Millar, James	MPD	
150175	Pte.	Miller, Albert Joseph	KIA	
183625	Pte.	Miller, Alfred	KIA	
446876	Pte.	Miller, Edmund	DOW	
80048	Pte.	Miller, James R.	KIA	
3131291	Pte.	Mills, Charles Robert	DOW	
79858	L/Cpl.	Milne, Arthur William	KIA	
473022	Pte.	Milne, James Wood	DOW	
696169	Pte.	Milnes, Herbert	DOW	
80080	L/Cpl.	Mitchell, Amos	KIA	
115632	Pte.	Mitchell, David	KIA	
427687	Pte.	Mitchell, Frank William	KIA	
696990	Pte.	Mitchell, William	DOW	
79256	Pte.	Mole, William	KIA	
79102	Pte.	Moncrieff, Alexander	KIA	
79351	Pte.	Montague, John Edward	KIA	
231638	Pte.	Mooney, Clifford Ayres	DOW	
183496	Pte.	Mooney, Wesley Irving	DOW	
408157	Pte.	Moore, Alfred	KIA	
447521	Pte.	Moore, Alfred Samuel	KIA	
79352	Pte.	Moore, Charles Edward	KIA	
2621960	Pte.	Moore, Henry Edward	KIA	
231042	Pte.	Moore, John Cecil	KIA	
79859	Sgt.	More, Peter James	DOD	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
184229	Pte.	Morrill, Guy	KIA	
425099	Pte.	Morris, Arthur Trevor	DOW	
435766	Pte.	Morris, Charles Philip Scott	KIA	
79950	Cpl.	Morris, David	KIA	
808761	L/Cpl.	Morris, Hobart Waugh	KIA	
79104	Cpl.	Morris, Mark	KIA	
425101	Pte.	Morris, William Pridmore	DOW	
2109823	Pte.	Morrison, Alva Durand	DOW	
460787	Pte.	Morrison, David Alfred	MPD	
811172	L/Cpl.	Morrison, Hugh Bayfield	KIA	
183459	Pte.	Mortimer, Alexander	KIA	
79252	Pte	Morton, John	DOW	
80263	Pte.	Mould, Henry James	KIA	
883470	Pte.	Moyer, Lincoln	DOW	
435798	Pte.	Muir, Herbert John Paxton	KIA	
425634	Pte.	Mungham, Henry Walter	KIA	
811814	Pte.	Murray, Edward Francis	KIA	
808066	Pte.	Murray, John Honey	DOAI	
183989	Pte.	Murtha, James	KIA	
79103	Cpl.	Musgrave, William Lawson	KIA	
101525	Sgt.	Nail, Marion Denver	KIA	MM
100603	Pte.	Neave, William	KIA	
696985	Pte.	Neilson, William Alexander	KIA	
231078	Pte.	Nelson, Thomas William	MPD	
696072	Pte.	Newbold, William Knifton	KIA	
446824	Pte.	Nicholson, Alexander Pope	KIA	
696360	Pte.	Nielsen, Niels Stubkar	KIA	
808090	Pte.	Norman, Thomas	KIA	
183320	L/Cpl.	Norton, Alfred	DOW	
80050	Pte.	Nunn, Charles	KIA	
210674	Pte.	Nunn, Robert Russell	KIA	
79867	Pte.	Nuttall, Ino Lawrence Kennedy	DOAI	
2621863	Pte.	O'Hearn, Philip Patrick	DOW	
101742	L/Cpl.	O'Keefe, Joseph	DOW as POW	
183064	Pte.	Oakes, James Richard	DOW	
446121	Pte.	Oates, Anthony	KIA	
425170	Pte.	Oliver, Joseph	KIA	
79356	L/Cpl.	Oliver, Thomas Edward	KIA	
696813	Pte.	Oppliger, Paul	KIA	
157039	Pte.	Orgar, James Edward	DOW	
79540	Pte.	Orr, Samuel	DOW	
425172	Pte.	Osborne, Joseph	KIA	
425173	Pte.	Ostrowiec, Eftime	KIA	
79357	Pte.	Ouimette, Charles Sevene	KIA	
446963	Pte.	Owen, Cyril Alfred	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
100698	Pte.	Owen, Herbert William	DOW as POW	
447182	Pte.	Page, Thomas,	MPD	
696024	Pte.	Page, Wilford	DOW	
160552	Cpl.	Park, Cecil Coleman	KIA	
811599	L/Sgt.	Park, Robert	KIA	MM
808766	Pte.	Parker, Emery Hubert	KIA	
80188	Pte.	Parker, Leonard	KIA	
622038	Pte.	Patey, Samuel	KIA	
3206141	Pte.	Pattison, Howard Wesley	DOW	
18228	Pte.	Patton, Samuel Porter	DOW	
79617	Pte.	Pavey, Herbert William	KIA	
703157	Pte.	Peacock, Sidney	KIA	
79294	Pte.	Pearce, Russell S.	DOW	
2621938	Pte.	Pearson, Harry	KIA	
79431	Pte.	Peck, Alfred Lorenzo	MPD	
883674	Pte.	Peck, William	KIA	
809172	Pte.	Pelkey, Lorne	KIA	
696447	Pte.	Pembroke, John	DOW	
654077	Pte.	Pemrose, James Ledran	KIA	
425201	L/Cpl.	Percy, Howard	DOW as POW	
79542	Sgt.	Peters, Rudolph Edward	DOW	
240428	Pte.	Phillips, Edward	KIA	
696319	Sgt.	Pickard, John	KIA	
184247	Pte.	Pickering, Elmer Raymond	KIA	
697059	Pte.	Pinkham, Charles Wesley	KIA	
79188	Pte.	Pirie, James	KIA	
435225	Pte.	Pitchford, Samuel	KIA	
472205	Pte.	Porter, Samuel Stroud	KIA	
183630	Pte.	Portway, Peter	KIA	
808724	Pte.	Potts, Thomas	KIA	
697069	Pte.	Power, George	KIA	
426742	Pte.	Pownall, Edward Warwick	DOW	
80269	Sgt.	Poyer, Julian Edward P.	KIA	
808609	Pte.	Pratt, Arkless	KIA	
79699	Cpl.	Preston, Roy	KIA	
625124	Pte.	Price, Harry Alexander	MPD	
696155	Pte.	Prince, Charles	DOD	
258524	Pte.	Prince, George	KIA	
79873	Sgt.	Profit, James Allen	KIA	DCM
79628	Sgt.	Proven, James Spalding	DOW	
79124	Sgt.	Proven, William	DOW	
602451	Pte.	Pycraft, Robert William	KIA	
430187	Pte.	Pyper, David	Dr. at sea	
811635	Pte.	Quinney, George Henry	KIA	
183290	Pte.	Radzev, Wademer	MPD	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
101357	Pte.	Rae, Merlin Hamilton	KIA	
3205564	Pte.	Rayfield, Fred William	DOW	
79799	Cpl.	Recknell, Charles Edward	KIA	
736286	Pte.	Redshaw, Arthur Richard	KIA	
161034	Pte.	Redshaw, John William	DOW as POW	
447681	Pte.	Reid, William Gordon	KIA	
811480	Pte.	Reynard, Frederick	KIA	
696885	Pte.	Rice, Albert Lorenzo	KIA	
696206	Pte.	Rich, John Henry	KIA	
100713	Pte.	Richardson, James Monilaws	KIA	
180416	Pte.	Richmond, Ellis	KIA	
696713	Pte.	Ripley, Raymond Jonathan	MPD	
79703	Pte.	Ritchie, James Philip	KIA	
808193	Cpl.	Robb, James	KIA	
79702	L/Cpl.	Roberts, Hugh	DOW	
696622	Pte.	Roberts, James Whitell	DOW	MM
809150	Pte.	Robertson, Charles Edward	MPD	
466470	L/Cpl.	Robertson, Herbert Robert J.	DOD	
79438	L/Cpl.	Robins, Howard Fleetwood	DOW	
79435	Pte.	Robinson, Hugh Miller	KIA	
2621980	Pte.	Robinson, John Nelson	KIA	
79877	Pte.	Robson, William Henry	KIA	
446828	Pte.	Rogers, Gilbert	KIA	
80227	Pte.	Rope, Leonard Godfrey	KIA	
463353	Cpl.	Ross, John	MPD	
79668	Pte.	Ross, William	KIA	
231698	Cpl.	Ross, William Herbert	DOW	MM
80084	Pte.	Rowley, Frank Elson	KIA	
408192	Pte.	Rowlinson, Arthur	KIA	
696988	Pte.	Rumberg, Oscar Alfred	MPD	
883243	Pte.	Runham, Thomas McGregor	KIA	
696572	Pte.	Rushworth, John	DOW	
100718	Pte.	Russ, Marion Wright	KIA	
160612	Pte.	Russell, Alexander	KIA	
79627	Pte.	Russell, Harry	KIA	
175345	Pte.	Russell, Robert	DOW	
183434	Pte.	Rustad, Guttorm	KIA	
184056	Pte.	Rutherford, Norman Neil	KIA	
425283	Pte.	Sager, John Earle	DOD	
79707	L/Cpl.	Salter, John Elliot	KIA	
883368	L/Cpl.	Saunders, James Arthur	KIA	
446419	Pte.	Saunders, Joseph	KIA	
183644	Pte.	Saunders, William	MPD	
100379	Pte.	Saunders, William Everette	DOW	
434467	Pte.	Scammell, Walter William	DOW	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
425715	Pte.	Schoemperlen, Alfred Frederick	KIA	
696653	Pte.	Scollen, Burnett	KIA	
3206532	Pte.	Setter, Peter	KIA	
696624	Pte.	Seward, John Burton	KIA	
434429	Pte.	Sewell, James	KIA	
425728	Pte.	Sexsmith, Colin Campbell	KIA	
697003	Pte.	Sakalevich, Kostantin	MPD	
184100	Pte.	Sharon, Hugh Frederick	MPD	
447212	Pte.	Sharpe, George Samuel	MPD	
79604	Pte.	Shaw, Alfred Frederick	DOD	
160358	Pte.	Shaw, Arthur Irwin	MPD	
100978	Pte.	Shaw, Charles Thomas	KIA	
426513	Pte.	Shaw, Ernest	KIA	
79968	Pte.	Shaw, Robert Edward	KIA	
101570	Pte.	Shaw, William George	DOW	
409537	Pte.	Shaw, William Leslie	MPD	
80236	Pte.	Shepherd, Edwin Baker	KIA	
79484	Pte.	Sheridan, Stanley	KIA	
100199	Pte.	Sherlock, Charles Forrester	DOW	
3205512	Pte.	Silcox, James Henry Birch	KIA	
446204	Pte.	Simmonds, Charles Ernest	DOD	
101744	Pte.	Simmons, Carl	DOW	DCM
446384	Pte.	Simpson, John William Ewart	KIA	
79607	L/Cpl.	Sims, Edward George	KIA	
79882	Pte.	Sims, William	Dr. at sea	
231163	Pte.	Sinclair, David	KIA	
446805	Pte.	Skelly, George	KIA	
184042	Pte.	Skinner, Francis Reginald	KIA	
2109954	Pte.	Smart, Harold Anson	KIA	MM
2109851	Pte.	Smith, Cecil Thomas	KIA	
101715	Pte.	Smith, Charles Henry	DOD	
696035	Pte.	Smith, Edward	KIA	
696616	Pte.	Smith, George Abraham	KIA	
79548	L/Cpl.	Smith, Gerald Flood	KIA	
895017	Pte.	Smith, Harold George	KIA	
425336	Pte.	Smith, Henry Leonard	KIA	
151914	Pte.	Smith, James	KIA	
427525	Pte.	Smith, James	KIA	
80111	Pte.	Smith, Thomas	KIA	
79546	Pte.	Smith, William James	DOW	
184204	Pte.	Sogge, Oscar	MPD	
183890	Pte.	Soulecho, Fred	MPD	
100396	Pte.	South, Ernest	KIA	
252478	Sgt.	Squires, Gordon Frank	KIA	
2109867	Pte.	Stanley, Harold Morgan	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
79677	Pte.	Steeds, Frederick Henry	MPD	
439000	Pte.	Steels, Alfred Ernest	KIA	
696909	L/Cpl.	Steen, Emery Ralph	KIA	
80258	Pte.	Stephen, Joseph	KIA	
696213	Pte.	Stephenson, James	DOW	
654768	Pte.	Stevens, George Louis	KIA	
435713	Pte.	Stevens, Leonard	KIA	
425364	Pte.	Stewart, Garfield	KIA	
160283	Pte.	Stewart, James	KIA	
79551	Pte.	Stewart, Robert	KIA	
444605	Pte.	Stiles, John Arthur	MPD	
80246	Pte.	Stitt, James	DOW	
79508	Pte.	Stone, Ernest Andrew	KIA	
425666	Pte.	Storry, Cedric William J.	DOW	
696887	Pte.	Strachan, Thomas Edgar Laidlaw	KIA	
447477	L/Cpl.	Strang, William	DOW	
466320	Pte.	Stratton, Arthur Philip	MPD	
427229	Pte.	Stromberg, Gustaf Adolph	KIA	
231346	Pte.	Stuart, Charles Alexander	KIA	
80141	Pte.	Stump, Leonard Edward	KIA	
425389	Pte.	Swannell, Frank Walton	KIA	
252194	Sgt.	Symon, John Forbes	DOW	
431116	Pte.	Symons, William	KIA	
808308	Pte.	Talbot, Henry Francis	DOW	
160965	Pte.	Taylor, Arthur H.	MPD	
80189	Pte.	Taylor, George Gilmore	DOW	
101041	Pte.	Taylor, John William	KIA	
79885	Cpl.	Teape, George Frederick	KIA	
696092	Pte.	Teel, Francis Delbert	KIA	
696837	Pte.	Teel, Norman Archibald	KIA	
447528	Pte.	Temple, James	KIA	
79712	Pte.	Thatcher, Wilfred	KIA	
426144	Pte.	Theaker, Thomas	KIA	
430086	Pte.	Thiebot, John Francis	KIA	
696576	Pte.	Thom, Alexander Watson	MPD	
18863	Pte.	Thomas, David	KIA	
425673	Pte.	Thomas, Harry	KIA	
2448458	Pte.	Thomas, Percy	KIA	
161039	Pte.	Thompson, David Scrimgeour	KIA	
446133	L/Cpl.	Thurlow, Harold Victor	KIA	
115508	L/Cpl.	Tilson, Henry	MPD	
696009	Pte.	Todd, Percy Frank	MPD	
101238	Pte.	Tole, Frank Edmund	KIA	
79713	Cpl.	Toole, Edward	KIA	
80094	Sgt.	Torrens, Edward	DOW	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
79886	Pte.	Treavor, Charles	KIA	
425431	Pte.	Tull, Henry	KIA	
183783	Pte.	Turner, Ambrose Hamilton	DOW	
100106	Pte.	Turner, William Henry	DOW	
696509	Pte.	Tyson, James	KIA	
696153	Pte.	Tyson, John	KIA	
2303843	Pte.	Veno, Archie Joseph	DOW	
883633	Pte.	Vig, John Olson	DOW	
2621886	Pte.	Waddington, Samuel	KIA	
696459	Pte.	Wade, Harvey William	KIA	
80108	Pte.	Wainwright, John Stanley	DOW	
79465	Pte.	Wakehan, John	KIA	
79891	Pte.	Walker, Edgar	KIA	
696340	Pt.	Walker, John	KIA	
883250	Pte.	Walker, John Harvey	KIA	
79553	Pte.	Wall, James Lister	DOW	
3206919	Pte.	Ward, Alfred Russell	KIA	
808031	Pte.	Warmington, James	KIA	
161117	Pte.	Warren, John David	KIA	
696538	Pte.	Watling, Stanley Richard	DOW	
183333	Pte.	Watson, James	KIA	
425616	Pte.	Watson, Thomas	DOW	
808260	L/Cpl.	Watson, William Robert	KIA	
425460	Pte.	Watters, John Edwin	KIA	
115754	Pte.	Waugh, Victor Eston	MPD	
446525	Pte.	Weaver, Charles	KIA	
80069	Pte.	Webber, Frederick William	KIA	
117617	Pte.	Weddell, John William	KIA	
696110	Pte.	Wedderburn, Lorimer Hamilton	MPD	
895077	Pte.	Weegar, Earl Adrian	KIA	
184119	L/Cpl.	Wemp, Oswald K.	KIA	
150694	Pte.	Wesley, Andrew	KIA	
231612	Pte.	West, Walter Melrose	KIA	
883215	Pte.	Wetham, Peter Grant	DOD	
160100	Pte.	Whitaker, Ernest	KIA	
79649	Pte.	Whitcutt, Frederick Charles	KIA	
455703	Pte.	White, William Kenneth	DOW	
696962	Pte.	Whitehead, Arthur	DOW	
696142	Pte.	Whitehead, George	KIA	
101720	Pte.	Wiberg, Edward Frederick	KIA	
79555	Cpl.	Wik, John	KIA	
430393	Cpl.	Williams, Harry McKay	KIA	
108631	Pte.	Williams, Oscar Cravath	DOW	
228482	Pte.	Williamson, Ernest	KIA	
79656	Pte.	Williamson, James	KIA	

Number	Rank	Name	Casualties	Awards
183302	Pte.	Wilcox, George	KIA	
696335	Pte.	Wilson, Charles	KIA	
696946	Pte.	Wilson, Fred	KIA	
79660	Sgt.	Wilson, George	DOW	
160270	Pte.	Wilson, James	MPD	
883754	Pte.	Wilson, James	DOW	
3205342	Pte.	Wilson, John Shepherd	KIA	
184104	Pte.	Wilson, Roger	KIA	
183352	Pte.	Wilson, William Charles	DOW	
161222	Pte.	Winkles, Sydney John	KIA	
231229	Pte.	Winter, John Abrahams S.	KIA	
696880	Pte.	Wishart, James	KIA	
79610	Cpl.	Witherby, Norman Gale	KIA	
696020	Pte.	Withers, Neil Albert	DOW	
80071	Sgt.	Wood, Albert Samuel	KIA	
101757	Pte.	Wood, George	DOW	
79472	Pte.	Woodger, Sydney G.	DOW	
101440	Cpl.	Woodland, Victor Benjamin	KIA	
79643	Cpl.	Woods, Charles	KIA	
80148	Pte.	Workman, George Handel Samuel	KIA	
79462	L/Cpl.	Worster, Harold E.	DOW	
447535	Pte.	Wright, Harold Armstrong	MPD	
811870	Pte.	Wyseman, Andrew	MPD	
696100	Pte.	Yarr, William John	KIA	
79802	Pte.	Young, Albert Stewart Logan	KIA	

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Medicine and Duty is the 1914–1917 memoir of Harold McGill, a medical officer in the 31st (Alberta) Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force. McGill attempted to have his memoir published by Macmillan of Canada in 1935, but due to financial constraints, the company was not able to complete the publication. Decades later, editor Marjorie Norris came upon a draft of the manuscript in the Glenbow Archives and took it upon herself to resurrect McGill's story.

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Marjorie Barron Norris is a writer and historian who lives in Calgary. She is the author of two Calgary histories: *A Leaven of Ladies: A History of the Calgary Local Council of Women*; and *Sister Heroines: The Roseate Glow of Wartime Nursing, 1914–1918*.